

Lowland fen

Current UK status and trends

Total extent is approximately 22,323ha across England. This is likely to be a significant decrease from 100 years ago.

Estimated current Northamptonshire resource

Approximately 136ha

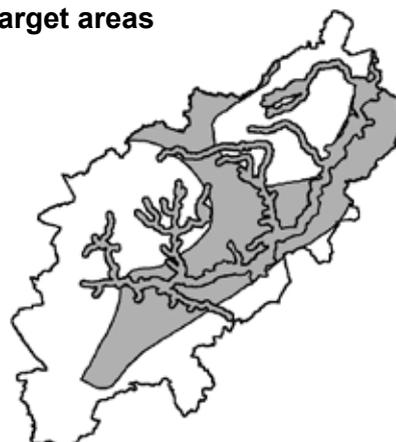
Progress towards BAP targets 2008–2015

32ha of lowland fen brought into management under environmental stewardship and 5ha restored

Lead partner

Wildlife Trust

Target areas



Habitat description



Fens usually occur over peat but can also form on a river or stream floodplain which is waterlogged and, typically, periodically inundated, in which case they are referred to as floodplain mires. It is this type of fen that occurs in Northamptonshire. Fens receive water and nutrients from soil, rock and groundwater as well as rainfall. They encompass a wide range of plant communities and can include swamps, mires, springs and flushes. Fens often occur in association with other semi-natural

habitats especially wet woodland, wet grassland and open water. In Northamptonshire fens occur solely on mineral soils, and are generally associated with other wetland habitats. They include NVC communities S22, S23, S26 and S28.

Similar habitats

Swamps tend to be relatively species-poor wetland habitats dominated by coarse grass or sedge species. They typically form in depressions in the ground, or as fringing vegetation on rivers, ponds, reservoirs etc. Springs occur where water wells up from underground aquifers, while flushes occur on sloping ground with impeded drainage. Species assemblages are partly determined by the underlying geology of the area.

Main issues and threats

- Very little remaining in Northamptonshire. Much is isolated in small fragments, dangerously reducing species' population sizes and making it impossible for individuals to move between habitat patches.
- Fragmentation due to land drainage and reclamation for agriculture
- Degradation in quality and species diversity due to lack of management and land drying

out often leading to scrub encroachment and succession to woodland

- Reduction in water quality, an increase in the incidence of pollution, both point source and diffuse, and nutrient enrichment

General strategy

- Conduct survey work and habitat opportunity mapping to identify the current resources and highest priorities for linkage by sympathetic management of degraded sites and establishment of new sites
- Reintroduce management and restore existing sites, funded primarily through Countryside Stewardship (advice can be provided by The Wildlife Trust)
- Monitor and manage water level and quality at the catchment scale to promote rehabilitation of degraded sites and creation of new sites. Bringing land adjacent to fen and wet woodland into a conservation scheme (i.e. creating buffer strips) is important to reduce nutrient enrichment.
- Ensure that flood risk management works with and enhances natural systems, for example through reconnecting watercourses with their floodplains
- Increase structural and floristic diversity and prevent dense scrub encroachment
- Establish a large-scale wetland complex incorporating all successional stages of fen

Targets

1. Maintain the current extent of fen-type habitat
2. Achieve favourable condition on 20ha of fen-type habitat by 2020
3. Restore 40ha of floodplain to LWS standard fen-type habitats by 2020
4. Create 20ha of fen-type habitats from arable, improved grassland or mineral extraction sites by 2020

Actions

A.	Identify the location of habitat that classifies as lowland fen	Wildlife Trust NBRC
B.	Manage existing fen-type resource in natures reserves and SSSI	Wildlife Trust Natural England
C.	Manage water level and quality at a catchment scale to promote rehabilitation of existing sites	RNRP Environment Agency
D.	Through management of flood risk create BAP quality lowland fen on the floodplain as natural flood defence	Environment Agency
E.	Restore areas of lowland fen in areas adjacent to existing fen, reedbed and wet woodland through Countryside Stewardship, targeting the Nene Valley	Natural England
F.	Through Section 106 agreements/new developments create areas of lowland fen on arable, improved grassland or mineral extraction sites	Developers Local authorities Wildlife Trust

Flagship species



- Marsh stitchwort
- Reed bunting
- Tubular water-dropwort
- Concolorous moth

Further information and management advice

- ▶ [Flora Locale's management, restoration and creation library](#)
- ▶ [Further habitat information from Natural England](#)
- ▶ [The Fen Management Handbook](#) (from Scottish Natural Heritage)
- ▶ [Lowland agricultural land drainage systems advice](#) (from RSPB)
- ▶ [Management advice for invertebrates](#) (from Buglife)