



Case Study 9.2 Changes in management at Kingsthorpe Meadow LNR, Northamptonshire



Historically, Kingsthorpe Meadow was lightly grazed by horses and cattle on alternate years. The three southernmost meadows were managed as water meadows until the 1940s. The western meadow on the north side was flooded in winter and allowed to freeze for the villagers to skate on.

The River Nene regularly floods, and the site has several old foot drains. The vegetation in 2009 was species-poor with bulky sedges and had severe problems with ragwort, dock and creeping thistle. The site objective had been to increase its use by birds such as wintering snipe. There is no public access.

Techniques used

A soil survey undertaken in autumn 2010 indicated that the soil had a high clay content, making it susceptible to compaction, but that some deep drainage was occurring as the soil profile showed good aeration at depth. A soil pit dug in spring 2011 confirmed that compaction was not a major problem. An NVC survey in summer 2011 found great burnet, meadowsweet and meadow foxtail in an adjacent compartment, suggesting that hay cuts had been undertaken in the past, and that a suitable hydrological regime might still exist over the site. Based on this information, a decision was taken to change from pasture to meadow management to increase the plant-species diversity and so control the spread of bulky sedges. In addition to hay cutting and aftermath grazing, hand pulling of weeds such as ragwort was carried out in the first year.

Kingsthorpe Meadow (compartment 2) has been managed by Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust for Northampton Borough Council since 1993. It is now in an HLS agreement. © RNRP





Monitoring

An NVC survey undertaken before the change in management provides a baseline against which future surveys can be compared. Fixed-point photography is undertaken.

Results

Fixed-point photography shows the meadow to be improving. Yellow-rattle, ragged-robin, common knapweed, great burnet and fine grasses have spread throughout the site. There are more wintering waders than before, with as many as 12 wintering snipe at any one time, and wintering lapwing, golden plover and curlew have been recorded since the change in management.

The start of hay cutting has resolved issues with weed species. Negative indicators such as bulky sedges and rushes appear to have decreased, whilst common ragwort and dock have been eliminated.

Benefits

- Increased offtake of nutrients from the Nene catchment through cropping for hay.
- Economic benefit through sale of hay and grazing
- Creation of 1.91 ha of flower-rich pollinator habitat.
- Creation of a demonstration and discussion site.

