

The Fens Integrated Biodiversity Delivery Area

'the Fens' skies will once again stretch out over productive land full of wildlife'

East Anglian Fens chosen as pilot for new approach

Our government renewed its commitment to reverse the UK's decline in biodiversity at the UN conference in Nagoya, Japan in 2010. But species in the UK are increasingly threatened with extinction and many of those which are numerous are continuing to decline rapidly in number. In recognition of their fantastic potential for wildlife, the East Anglian Fens have been chosen by the England Biodiversity Group as a pilot Integrated Biodiversity Delivery Area (IBDA) to tackle these declines by working in a new way – across the whole Fens. **The Fens IBDA** will integrate the efforts of concerned local people -conservationists, farmers, drainage engineers, archaeologists businessmen and women, - to build a flourishing future for wildlife and our children.



Fens IBDA area

Peat fen soil is being lost at an average of 1.2cm a year through soil erosion and shrinkage, reducing soil fertility and changing the way farming operates. With climate change, water will be in ever increasing demand and loss of peat releases carbon into the atmosphere, compounding the problem.

Treasures of the Fens

The Fens were once one of Europe's most extensive wetlands. Their drained rich black peat soils are now one of the most productive areas of arable farmland in the UK. But the area remains of outstanding importance for a number of wetland species, which love the habitat offered by fens, reedbeds, wet grassland and ditches and its arable land provides one of the country's remaining strongholds for farmland birds. The Fen soils are a time capsule in which evidence of the last 10,000 years of environmental change and human activity is well preserved, from 3,000 year old eel traps to mediaeval fishing sites. The survival of this natural and cultural heritage depends upon a balance in the management of land and water to preserve the special character of the area for generations to come.

"The Fens IBDA is integrating a landscape, which has tremendous potential and importance, across local government, county and regional boundaries."

*Martin Redding, Assistant Engineering Manager and Environmental Officer,
Witham Fourth District Internal Drainage Board*



Eyed longhorn beetle

Fen species struggle to survive

Only a fraction of original Fen wetland remains. Across the area, once common species are struggling to survive or have become locally extinct as their habitats become fragmented, polluted or disappear:

- Iconic species have been lost, such as the swallowtail and large copper butterfly.
- Tiny populations hang on: the eyed longhorn beetle has one small population remaining; a Lincolnshire drain holds one of only two known populations of ribbon-leaved plantain in the UK.
- Species populations are hugely decreased: non-native mink continue to threaten water voles; farmland bird populations have collapsed; eel numbers are minimal.

The Fens IBDA Partnership will:

Maximise the potential of existing wetlands

- extend and buffer wetland sites, allowing the wildlife they hold to spread and flourish, as is happening at Great Fen
- improve understanding, by using practical examples, of the way wetlands can improve water quality, reduce flood risk and provide water storage for agriculture
- demonstrate the value of these areas for carbon storage

Wetland sites that ring the Fens edge demonstrate the beauty and diversity of wetland wildlife. Some, like Baston and Thurlby, Wood Walton and Wicken Fen, represent remnants of original Fen. Others, like Lakenheath Fen, demonstrate how swiftly biodiversity can increase in newly created wetlands, with bitterns and cranes breeding within 15 years of its conversion from arable fields. But each of these sites is too small to halt the loss of biodiversity across the Fens and currently provide little opportunity for species to move in response to climate change.

Encourage people to enjoy the Fens

- develop walking and cycling routes so people can experience the best of the Fens' history, wildlife and vast skies
- inspire people by the international importance of what is on their doorstep
- provide opportunity for involvement through arts, history and wildlife activities.

“The Fens will be a place where we can have a break from the stress of modern life - and where our souls are fed by the wonder of the beauty we encounter, for generations to come.”

Kate Milne, local villager

If you would like to get involved, or would like more information, contact Catherine Weightman, project officer, catherine.weightman@naturalengland.org.uk, 07796 938198.

Develop a mosaic of habitats across the Fens

- develop links between wetland sites to allow species to spread and move across the Fens
- combine our specialist skills to learn more about what makes drains and ditches good for wetland species so their management can be improved further, while retaining the efficiency of the drainage system
- support and celebrate the role of farmers in providing nature friendly habitat and enable many more to do so
- develop new ways of monitoring to understand how wildlife across the Fens is changing

“We as 21st century farmers realise that conservation must be part of our work. This new landscape vision must now inspire us so both farming and our environment can prosper in the future.”

Rex Sly, farmer and fenland author



Wet grasslands are vital breeding grounds for Common Snipe and other threatened waders



Restored fenland at Lakenheath

The Fens IBDA is a partnership including: Anglia Ruskin University, Buglife, Cambridge Archaeological Unit, Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Country Land and Business Association, English Heritage, Environment Agency, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, Internal Drainage Boards, Local Authorities, National Farmers Union, National Trust, Natural England, Plantlife, RSPB, Smiths Gore, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, Wildlife Trusts