



East Chevington © Kevin O'Hara



Working with Wildlife

## Reedbed Habitat Action Plan

Plan Co-ordinator	Rivers & Wetlands Group
Plan Author	Elaine Jaggs
Plan Lead	Northumberland Wildlife Trust
Latest version	January 2008

### Conservation Status

UK Biodiversity Action Plan Habitat  
North East Biodiversity Action Plan Habitat

### Description

Reedbeds are areas of shallow water dominated by a tall wetland grass called common reed, *Phragmites australis*. Common reed is the UK's largest native grass and is particularly conspicuous, with cane like stems that last throughout winter. Reedbeds occur at the margins of all kinds of water bodies including areas of open water, ditches, and wet grassland. They can also occur alongside several other habitats including wet woodlands and willow dominated scrub. They can be wet or dry at the base, but the water table generally needs to be at or near ground level for most of the year for the habitat to thrive.

Reedbeds are a mid successional vegetation phase; with silting up, willow scrub and eventually carr woodland developing. Allowing grading of these successional habitats will not only support those species that require specific parts of the transition zone but also those that require habitat mosaics that incorporate reedbeds.

Reedbeds are known to support high invertebrate species diversity. Four species of bird are highly dependent on reedbeds for their survival; reed warbler, bearded tit, marsh harrier and bittern. They also provide nesting, roosting or feeding sites for various songbirds, waders, rails and wildfowl.

Where the reedbed habitat is smaller than 0.25 ha and within another larger Northumberland biodiversity action plan habitat then, for mapping purposes, it is counted as the larger habitat. Similarly, where the reedbed community is narrower than 5m around the fringe of a waterbody, it is counted as part of the waterbody.

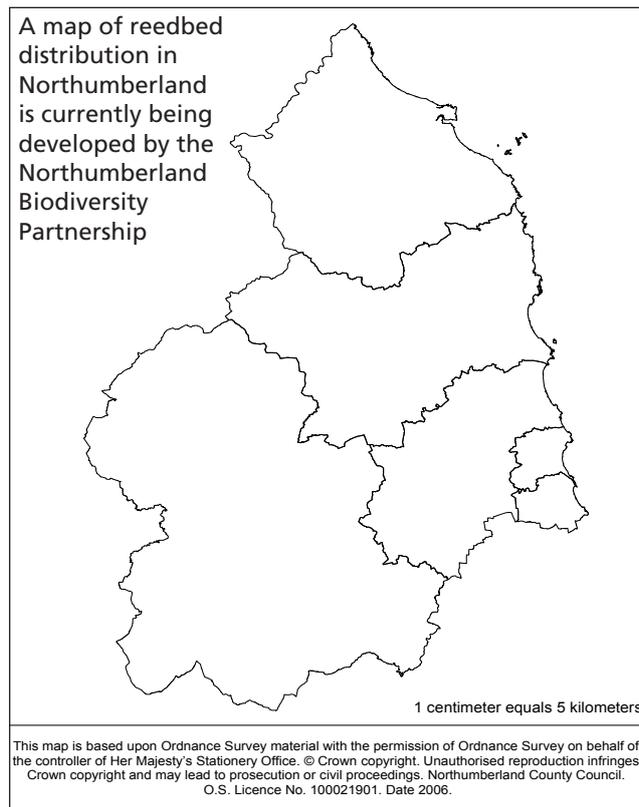
### Current Extent in Northumberland

Reedbed is an extremely uncommon habitat in Northumberland with one large developing reedbed complex at East Chevington. A number of small reedbeds of a fragmentary nature are scattered throughout the county; located in mining subsidence ponds, sand and gravel extraction sites, lakes, rivers and ditches. A UK national survey in 2003 estimated a total of 5,000 ha of reedbed nationwide, from 900 sites. Only about 50 of these sites are greater than 20 hectares in size and are mainly found in the south and east of England.

The relatively small and fragmented nature of the reedbeds in Northumberland and their isolation from larger sites means that the biodiversity value, although still very rich, is less than the extensive reedbeds in counties like Norfolk and Suffolk. There is however potential to create significant areas of reedbed habitat through the restoration of minerals extraction sites, particularly within the Northumberland Coalfield.

The current area of reedbed in the county has not been calculated.

## Reedbed Habitat Action Plan



### Current Factors Causing Loss or Decline

- Nutrient enrichment (eutrophication)
- Damage and destruction from livestock grazing of marginal vegetation
- Pollution from runoff and mine water
- Illegal rubbish dumping
- Conversion to agriculture
- Inappropriate management leading to drying out, scrub encroachment and succession to woodland
- Small total area and fragmented nature of current sites
- Habitat loss to development
- Lack of data regarding extent and quality of habitat
- Changes in water supply from flood protection, land drainage and abstraction leading to drying out of reedbed and increasing speed of natural succession to scrub
- Disturbance from recreational activities e.g. angling, waterborne transport, noise and physical disturbance
- Subsidence and coastal changes increasing site salinity

### Associated Action Plans

Otter  
 Water Vole  
 Bats  
 Coastal Birds  
 Farmland Birds  
 Upland Waders

### Further Information

This reedbed action plan links to the reedbed UK BAP action plan, whose lead partners are Natural England and Faber Maunsell.

### Targets

**Maintain the current extent of reedbed in Northumberland by 2010**

Code	Priority Actions	Date
R A01	Identify the location and extent of Northumberland's reedbed resource	2008
R A02	Carry out condition monitoring of reedbed in Northumberland	ongoing
R A03	Identify and pursue opportunities to restore or create reedbed habitat through landscaping and mitigation of development schemes	ongoing
R A04	Review the reedbed habitat action plan once baseline data is available and create targets to increase the identified extent	2009