

## 53. Chippenham Fen

**Geographical Coordinates** 52°18'N 0°25'E

**Area** 115ha

**Location** About 7km north-north-east of the town of Newmarket, in the county of Cambridgeshire, eastern England.

**Date of Ramsar Designation** 11 March 1992.

**Other International Designations** None.

**National Designations** National Nature Reserve (NNR); Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

**Principal Features** A spring-fed calcareous basin mire with a long history of management. The site is notable for its ecological diversity, for it contains not only characteristic areas of sedge fen, but also fen meadow, chalk grassland, *Alnus/Salix* carr and taller woodland (*Fraxinus*, *Quercus*, *Betula*). The north-eastern part of the site, and other smaller areas, contain old planted woodland, dating from attempted drainage in the late eighteenth century. The western end of the fen has a history of peat digging and is lower and wetter than the rest of the site. It supports eutrophic, tall fen communities with *Phragmites australis*, *Eupatorium cannabinum*, *Filipendula ulmaria* and extensive beds of *Cladium mariscus*. There are also shorter fen communities with *Schoenus nigricans*, *Juncus subnodulosus*, *Epipactis palustris*, *Serratula tinctoria* and *Cirsium dissectum*. The fen meadow communities are less wet and have an abundance of grasses (including *Molinia caerulea*, *Deschampsia cespitosa*, *Serratula tinctoria* and *Briza media*), *Carex flacca*, *C. hostiana*, *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* and *Gymnadenia conopsea*. More than 300 species of flowering plants have been recorded, including the very rare umbellifer *Selinum carvifolia*, found at only three sites in Britain. Many of the other plants are regionally rare or local (e.g. *Menyanthes trifoliata*, *Pedicularis palustris*, *Hottonia palustris*). Chippenham Fen also supports a rich fauna, notably invertebrates, including several rare moths, especially *Deltote bankiana*. A notable assemblage of breeding birds includes *Gallinago gallinago*, *Scolopax rusticola*, *Luscinia megarhynchos*, *Locustella naevia* and *Acrocephalus* spp. (1a,2a,2b,2c,3b)

**Conservation Issues** Chippenham Fen is one of only four significant areas of the East Anglian fenland to have survived drainage and conversion to agriculture. The site is privately owned, but leased and managed by English Nature. The fen is fed by springs from the underlying chalk aquifer and by winter rainfall, and its water regime is controlled by a carefully managed system of ditches, dams and sluices. Maintenance of a reasonably high summer water table is vital to the fen's survival. In recent years, however, increasing water abstraction (by Anglian Water Services) in the area led to a likelihood that the springs feeding the site would be seriously depleted, especially in years of low rainfall. In 1991, the National Rivers Authority constructed a water compensation scheme for the site, so that water can be pumped to the fen from a borehole, some 3km distant, as and when required. A comprehensive monitoring programme has been implemented, and to date, no adverse changes have been detected. Scrub removal is carried out in some parts of the site in winter, while the fen meadows are mown in late summer to maintain herb-rich communities. *Cladium mariscus* is cut and sold for thatching.