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# RAMSAR INFORMATION SHEET

## FOR WETLANDS OF INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE

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**Site reference number** 7UK012  
**1 Compilation date** 05/03/93  
**2 Country** UK (England)  
**3 Name of wetland** Ouse Washes  
**4 Site centre location:** Latitude: 52 28 34 N Longitude: 00 12 19 E  
**5 Altitude (m)** **Min:** **Max:** **Mean**  
**6 Area (ha)** 2469.08

### 7 Overview

This site is an area of seasonally flooded washland habitat managed in a traditional agricultural manner. The washlands support nationally and internationally important numbers of wintering waterfowl and nationally important numbers of breeding waterfowl. The site is also of note for the large area of unimproved neutral grassland communities which it holds and for the richness of the aquatic flora within the associated watercourses.

**8 Wetland type** Inland wetland, Man-made wetland

Code	Name	% Area
<a href="#">M</a>	<a href="#">Permanent rivers/streams/creeks</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">2</a>	<a href="#">Ponds</a>	<a href="#">1.7</a>
4	Seasonally flooded agricultural land	<del>100</del> <a href="#">87.3</a>
<a href="#">9</a>	<a href="#">Canals and drainage channels, ditches</a>	<a href="#">7</a>

**9 Ramsar Criteria** 1, 2, 5, 6  
**10 Map of the site** √  
**11 Compiler** **Joint Nature Conservation Committee**  
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### 12 Justification of criteria

#### Ramsar criterion 1a

The site is a good representative example of a natural or near-natural wetland characteristic of its biogeographic region. It is one of the most extensive areas of seasonally flooding washland of its type in Britain, and the wetland has high conservation value for many plants and animals.

#### Ramsar criterion 2a

The site supports appreciable numbers of nationally rare plants and animals. This includes several nationally scarce plants, including, small water pepper *Polygonum minus*, whorled water-milfoil *Myriophyllum verticillatum*, greater water parsnip *Sium latifolium*, river water-dropwort *Oenanthe fluviatilis*, fringed water-lily *Nymphoides peltata*, long-stalked pondweed *Potamogeton praelongus*, hair-like pondweed *Potamogeton trichoides*, grass-wrack pondweed *Potamogeton compressus*, tasteless water-pepper *Polygonum mite* and marsh dock *Rumex palustris*. Invertebrate records indicate that the site holds good relict fenland fauna, including the National Red Data Book species, large darter dragonfly *Libellula fulva* and the rifle beetle *Oulimnius major*.

The site also supports a diverse assemblage of nationally rare breeding waterfowl associated with seasonally flooding wet grassland.

#### Ramsar criterion 5

Internationally important waterfowl assemblage (greater than 20,000 birds)

#### Ramsar criterion 6

Over winter the site regularly supports internationally important populations of: Bewick's Swan *Cygnus columbianus bewickii*, Gadwall *Anas strepera*, Pintail *Anas acuta*, Shoveler *Anas clypeata*, Teal *Anas crecca*, Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*, Wigeon *Anas penelope*

### 13 General location

Nearest town/city: Ely

The site lies in the counties of Cambridgeshire and west Norfolk. It extends for 36 km SW of Downham Market to Earith.

**Administrative Region:** Norfolk, Cambridgeshire

### 14 Physical Features

Soil & Geology	acidic, alluvium, basic, neutral, peat
Geomorphology and Landscape	floodplain, lowland
Nutrient status	eutrophic
pH	circumneutral
Salinity	fresh
Soil	mainly organic
Water permanence	usually seasonal / intermittent
Summary of main climatic features	Rainy, temperate climate with a mild winter and periodic frost. Mean minimum temperature approximately 7.8°C. Mean maximum temperature approximately 14.7°C. Mean annual precipitation approximately 548.7mm, with a winter maximum.

### 15 Hydrological values

Flood water storage / desynchronisation of flood peaks

### 16 Ecological features

The site is one of the country's few remaining areas of extensive washland habitat. It is notable for the large area of unimproved neutral grassland it holds. The grassland communities are characterised by such species as reed and floating sweet grass *Glyceria maxima* and *G. fluitans*, reed canary-grass *Phalaris arundinacea*, marsh foxtail *Alopecurus geniculatus* together with a variety of sedges and rushes. Typical herbs include amphibious bistort *Polygonum amphibium*, water pepper *Polygonum hydropiper*, and tubular water dropwort *Oenanthe fistulosa*. The associated dykes and rivers hold a great variety of aquatic plants, the pondweeds *Potamogeton* spp are particularly well represented. Other aquatic species include the fringed water lily *Nymphoides peltata*, greater water-parsnip *Sium latifolium* and the four species of duckweeds *Lemna* spp. The Old Bedford River and River Delph are good examples of base-rich, slow flowing lowland rivers. The flora includes the fan leaved water crowfoot *Ranunculus circinatus*, yellow water-lily *Nuphar lutea* and river water-dropwort *Oenanthe fluvitalis*.

### 17 Noteworthy flora

## Nationally important species occurring on the site.

### Higher Plants.

*Latuca saligna*, *Alisma gramineum*, *Sium latifolium*, *Oenanthe fluviatilis*, *Nymphoides peltata*, *Potamogeton praelongus*, *Potamogeton trichoides*, *Potamogeton compressus*, *Polygonum mite*, *Rumex palustris*.

## 18 Noteworthy fauna

### Birds

#### Species occurring at levels of international importance (as identified at designation):

##### Over winter the area regularly supports:

Bewick's Swan, <i>Cygnus columbianus bewickii</i> (Western Siberia/North-eastern & North-western Europe)	4639 individuals, representing an average of 27.3% of the population (5 year peak mean 1991/92-1995/96)
Gadwall, <i>Anas strepera</i> (North-western Europe)	342 individuals, representing an average of 1.1% of the population (5 year peak mean 1991/92-1995/96)
Pintail, <i>Anas acuta</i> (North-western Europe)	1755 individuals, representing an average of 2.9% of the population (5 year peak mean 1991/92-1995/96)
Shoveler, <i>Anas clypeata</i> (North-western/Central Europe)	681 individuals, representing an average of 1.7% of the population (5 year peak mean 1991/92-1995/96)
Teal, <i>Anas crecca</i> (North-western Europe)	3085 individuals, representing an average of 0.8% of the population (5 year peak mean 1991/92-1995/96)
Whooper Swan, <i>Cygnus cygnus</i> (Iceland/UK/Ireland)	963 individuals, representing an average of 6% of the population (5 year peak mean 1991/92-1995/96)
Wigeon, <i>Anas penelope</i> (Western Siberia/North-western/North-eastern Europe)	29713 individuals, representing an average of 2.4% of the population (5 year peak mean 1991/92-1995/96)

#### Species occurring at levels of international importance (as identified post-designation):

##### Over winter the area regularly supports:

Black-tailed Godwit, <i>Limosa limosa islandica</i> (Iceland (breeding))	1198 individuals, representing an average of 1.8% of the population (5 year peak mean 1991/92-1995/96)
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#### Species currently occurring at levels of national importance:

##### Over winter the area regularly supports:

Bean Goose, <i>Anser fabalis</i>	7 individuals, representing an average of 1.6% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1991/92-1995/96)
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Coot, <i>Fulica atra</i> (North-western Europe (wintering))	2201 individuals, representing an average of 1.9% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1991/92-1995/96)
Cormorant, <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i> (North-western Europe)	259 individuals, representing an average of 2% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1991/92-1995/96)
Hen Harrier, <i>Circus cyaneus</i>	12 individuals, representing an average of 1.6% of the GB population (6 year mean 1982-1987)
Mute Swan, <i>Cygnus olor</i> (North-western Mainland & Central Europe)	611 individuals, representing an average of 2.4% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1991/92-1995/96)
Pochard, <i>Aythya ferina</i> (North-western/North-eastern Europe)	3135 individuals, representing an average of 7.2% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1991/92-1995/96)
Ruff, <i>Philomachus pugnax</i> (Western Africa (wintering))	137 individuals, representing an average of 19.6% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1991/92-1995/96)
Tufted Duck, <i>Aythya fuligula</i> (North-western Europe)	986 individuals, representing an average of 1.6% of the GB population (5 year peak mean 1991/92-1995/96)

**Assemblages of international importance:**

**Over winter the area regularly supports:**

64428 waterfowl (5 year peak mean 1991/92-1995/96)

**Species occurring at levels of international importance.**

**Fish.**

*Cobitis taenia.*

**Invertebrates.**

*Libellula fulva, Oulimnius major*

**19 Social and Cultural Values**

- Aesthetic
- Conservation education
- Livestock grazing
- Non-consumptive recreation
- Sport fishing
- Sport hunting
- Transportation/navigation

**20 Land tenure/ownership**

Ownership category	On-Site	Off-Site
Private	+	+

**21 Current land use**

Activity	On-Site	Off-Site	Scale
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Nature conservation	+		Large-Scale
Fishing: recreational/sport	+		Small-Scale
Arable agriculture (unspecified)	+	+	Small-Scale
Permanent pastoral agriculture	+		Large-Scale
Hay meadows	+		Small-Scale
Hunting: recreational/sport	+		Small-Scale
Flood control	+		Large-Scale

## 22 Adverse factors affecting the ecological character of the site

Activity	On-Site	Off-Site	Scale
Vegetation succession	+		Large-Scale
Drainage/reclamation for agriculture	+		Large-Scale
Water diversion for irrigation/domestic/industrial use	+		Large-Scale
Eutrophication	+		Large-Scale
Reservoir/barrage/dam impact: flooding	+		Large-Scale
Measures not linked to specific factors	+		Large-Scale

## 23 Conservation measures taken

Conservation measure	On-site	Off-site
SSSI	+	
SPA	+	
Candidate SAC	+	
Site management statement/plan implemented	+	

## 24 Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented

see below

### Site vulnerability and management statement

Much of the conservation importance of the Ouse Washes is due to its continued use as functional washland, with extensive winter flooding and traditional forms of agricultural management, including grazing and mowing of permanent grassland and rotational ditch clearance. In recent years, summer flooding (April- May) has adversely affected both the breeding birds and the traditional washland management regime. It also results in *Glyceria* competing with the other grasses and herbs which may affect food availability for wintering waterfowl. This problem is now being addressed by the Environment Agency and by other bodies with a major interest in managing the washes, through the Ouse Washes Management Strategy. Severe siltation in the Great Ouse River is a factor affecting the drainage of the Ouse Washes. Nutrient enrichment continues to be a problem, possibly resulting in some plant species as well as some fish and invertebrate species declining. These issues are currently being investigated by the Environment Agency.

Wildfowling takes place on the site but it is not considered to cause significant disturbance at current levels. Any proposals for increased wildfowling will be regulated through the Habitat Regulations.

## 25 Current scientific research/survey/monitoring and facilities

### Fauna.

Numbers of migratory and wintering wildfowl and waders are monitored annually as part of the national Wetland Birds Survey (WeBS) organised by the British Trust for Ornithology, Wildfowl &

Wetlands Trust, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee.

Breeding bird surveys.

Spined Loach surveys.

### **Miscellaneous.**

Refer to Ouse Washes Management Strategy for further information on current and proposed monitoring/research.

## **26 Current conservation education**

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust have provided information centres at the site.

## **27 Current recreation and tourism**

### **Activities, Facilities provided and Seasonality.**

RSPB, WWT information centres and public bird watching hides.

## **28 Functional jurisdiction**

Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

## **29 Management authority**

English Nature

## **30 Bibliography**

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Reference should also be made to Country Agencies Management Plans for sites that are within National Nature Reserves.

### **Specific References**