

Kemerton Conservation Trust

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**GOVERNORS**

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Acquisition of 16 acres of rare flood meadow in Upham Meadow SSSI Project – Final Report 11th July 2023

Project Background

Upham Meadow SSSI consists of unimproved seasonally-flooded grassland or flood meadow, partly classified as NVC type MG4 (a subdivision of the UK BAP Priority Habitat Lowland Meadows characterised by the presence of meadow foxtail and great burnet). Upham is an example of the well-known but now very rare ‘Lammas meadow’, which is shut up for hay in early spring, cropped in July, and grazed communally after Lammas Day on 1st August. Nutrients are supplied by periodic flooding episodes, mostly in winter. Upham is important for rare flora such as narrow-leaved water dropwort, as well as for breeding wading birds including curlew.

Less than 3,700 acres (1,500 ha) of MG4 flood meadow now survives in the UK. The Trust owns 50 acres (20 ha) of flood meadow including parts of Upton Ham SSSI, Upham Meadow SSSI and Asham Meadow. Trust Chairman Adrian Darby personally owns another 103 acres (42 ha) at Upton Ham and Brookfield Farm which the Trust helps to manage. Together, these areas represent approximately 4.1% of the entire national resource of surviving flood meadow. Given the rarity of this type of habitat and the importance of the flora and fauna it supports, there is a very pressing need to protect it for the future.

Upham Meadow is currently divided into numerous parcels and multiple ownerships. A number of parcels, including Trust land, are managed under a Higher Level Environmental Stewardship Scheme (HLS) for the benefit of wildlife. However, some parcels are not currently in the scheme and thus are more vulnerable to unsympathetic farming practices. In particular, silage cutting, early hay-cutting and spraying for ragwort can result in the total destruction of curlew nests with devastating consequences for breeding success.

In May 2022 three parcels of land on Upham Meadow totalling approx. 16 acres came up for auction by sealed bid. Trust Governors made the decision to bid on the land and the Trust’s bid was accepted, subject to contract. The land in question has a low value on the open market because it can never be developed and is not suitable for crops (Upham Meadow is a key part of the Avon’s flood plain and spends weeks underwater in winter every year) but its conservation value is immense. Through purchasing these parcels, the Trust can guarantee their sympathetic management into the future.

In June 2022 fundraising for the project began, with an ambitious target of raising £17,500 (just over 50% of the project budget) from grants. The balance would come from the Trust’s own surplus, as purchasing this land is part of our long-term aim to increase our flood meadow holdings. Over six months, the Trust secured £11,000 in grants from the following

fundings: Gloucestershire County Council's Build Back Better grant via Councillor Cate Cody, waste management company Grundon through the Landfill Communities Fund, The Martin Wills Wildlife Maintenance Trust, The Rowlands Trust, The Summerfield Trust and the Woodroffe Benton Fund. Although this was lower than our original target, a decision was made to proceed with the purchase and cover the shortfall from the Trust's own surplus.

Project Aims

The aims of this project were as follows:

1. Increase the area of rare SSSI flood meadow owned and managed by the Trust to protect this vitally important habitat into the future.
2. Ensure the flood meadow's financial sustainability into the future receiving annual income from the hay sales and by adding the new land into the Trust's existing Higher Level Stewardship if allowed.
3. Include the new flood meadow land in our existing partnership working with Curlew Action Group and WWT Slimbridge, which will increase the area available for safe breeding for these threatened birds.

Overview of Works

The Trust's initial bid was made in May 2022 and our offer was accepted on 20th June 2022. Conveyancing was expected to take 3 months, but delays caused primarily by Tewkesbury Borough Council's land searches team meant the sale did not complete until 20th February 2023.

A press release was issued to local newspapers on 21st February highlighting the purchase and our funders. The information was also posted on our Facebook page.

Once the purchase was complete, the Trust informed Curlew Action Group and WWT Slimbridge of our new ownership and sent maps to ensure the team knew where the parcels were located. We also confirmed these new parcels could be surveyed and included in the existing partnership with immediate effect.

We also confirmed the change of ownership with Twynning Ham Pasture Holders Committee, and Derek Roberts, who purchases our hay at the site every year.

On 28th April we held a Curlew Walk at Upham Meadow SSSI to celebrate the successful purchase. Trust Chairman Adrian Darby was joined by Mike Smart from the WWT Slimbridge project team, and Juliet Bailey from Gloucestershire Naturalists Society, to talk about the curlew project and the flora of the meadow respectively. Gloucestershire County Councillor Cate Cody joined us for the walk, as did Ian Smith, Trustee of The Rowlands Trust, along with 15 members of the Trust's Friends scheme. The group size was kept small to minimise damage or excessive disturbance to the Curlew.

In early June a work party of KCT volunteers, led by Governor Peter Doble and Support Coordinator Kate Aubury, carried out hand pulling of Marsh Ragwort from two of the new parcels. This is part of ongoing ragwort management at the site, which must be controlled in the hay crop due to its potentially fatal effect on livestock if they eat it. The team cleared all visible Marsh Ragwort from both parcels, as well as pulling more from one of our existing parcels while onsite.

Project Results

Due to factors outside of the Trust's control, the project overran its original deadline of

December 2022. Final costs were also slightly over the original budget of £31,500 due to an increase in conveyancing fees. The Trust also did not hit its fundraising target and so had to cover more of the project costs from prior year surpluses. However, the land purchase was able to proceed, and the project can be counted as a success as the Trust has increased our holdings at Upham Meadow SSSI by 16 acres, almost doubling our land ownership at this key wildlife site. Together with other committed landowners on the meadow, we can continue to manage this unique habitat into the future.

Of our original aims, aim 1 and aim 3 were met in full by the end of the project. Aim 2 has been partially met, with hay sales agreed for 2023, but the Trust is still investigating the possibility of adding the land into our existing Countryside Stewardship scheme.

The Future

The Acquisition of 16 acres of rare flood meadow in Upham Meadow SSSI Project has officially ended but the Trust plans to hold a talk at Twyning Village Hall over winter 2023/24 to highlight the meadow's importance and educate residents on the flora and fauna found there.

Our next newsletter will include an article celebrating the purchase and thanking our funders.

Work continues on trying to add the new parcels into our existing Countryside Stewardship scheme.

Acknowledgements

Kemerton Conservation Trust would like to thank our funders Gloucestershire County Council's Build Back Better grant via Councillor Cate Cody, waste management company Grundon through the Landfill Communities Fund, The Martin Wills Wildlife Maintenance Trust, The Rowlands Trust, The Summerfield Trust and the Woodroffe Benton Fund; without whom this land purchase could not have been carried out.

We would also like to thank all those who assisted in the delivery of the project, particularly our hardworking volunteers.



Upham Meadow SSSI Acquisition Project Photo Montage

All photos copyright Kate Aubury



Upham Meadow SSSI after haymaking, August 2022



Upham Meadow SSSI during winter flooding, 2014



KCT Chairman Adrian Darby OBE leading a Curlew Walk at Upham Meadow SSSI, April 2023



Mike Smart from WWT Slimbridge Curlew Project Team talking about Curlew on the meadow during a Curlew Walk at Upham Meadow SSSI, April 2023



Juliet Bailey from Gloucestershire Naturalists Society talking about the flora of the meadow during a Curlew Walk at Upham Meadow SSSI, April 2023



Narrow-leaved Water-dropwort in flower at Upham Meadow SSSI, June 2023



Governor Peter Doble walking through one of the new parcels, June 2023



Marsh Ragwort in one of the new parcels, June 2023



Volunteer Ray hand-pulling Ragwort in one of the new parcels, June 2023



Volunteer Ali hand-pulling Ragwort in one of the new parcels, June 2023



Roe Deer in the hay, Upham Meadow SSSI, June 2023



View across one of the new parcels towards Bredon Hill, June 2023



Ashy Mining Bee on Narrow-leaved Water-dropwort, Upham Meadow SSSI, June 2023