

# Farming for A Living Landscape



## Lincolnshire's Coastal Grazing Marsh

### Restoring a productive pastoral landscape

*This partnership project is protecting and restoring grassland and wetland habitats in ways that provide income for farmers. It demonstrates the benefits of a targeted approach within a landscape-scale framework to lever funding from a variety of sources and promote both food production and other ecosystem goods and services provided by pastoral farming and biodiversity enhancement.*

The project's aims can only be achieved with the support of the farming community. Unfortunately, a combination of expiring classic schemes, market trends and potential budget cuts threatens to undo the achievements made to date.

### Opportunities for people and wildlife

Lincolnshire's coastal landscape was once characterised by long, narrow fields separated by a network of water-filled ditches, which kept the land dry enough to produce a good crop of grass. These permanently wet ditches were very rich in wildlife and the fields provided ideal conditions for birds like lapwing and snipe to breed.

Over the last fifty years, more and more of this pasture has been cultivated and now grows arable crops: 25% of the grassland was

ploughed between 1990 and 2000. Where grassland and water-filled ditches remain, the typical grazing marsh plants and animals are merely hanging on. The distinctive landscape, with its associated rich wildlife, is fast disappearing.

The Lincolnshire Coastal Grazing Marshes Project aims to reverse the decline in biodiversity in the grazing marshes, whilst encouraging the retention and re-establishment of viable pastoral farms and stimulating local



economic activity through tourism and marketing locally produced quality goods and services.

Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust and partners are working in four core areas covering more than 9,000 ha (Saltfleetby, Huttoft, Burgh Le Marsh and Croft). With the aid of agri-environment funding, remaining areas of grassland have been protected and extended and it has been possible to influence drainage without affecting neighbouring landowners.



## Wildlife benefits

In the Burgh Le Marsh area, Bratoft Meadows SSSI is now surrounded by grassland in HLS and the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. Raising water levels as part of these schemes has produced rapid results. Three years after re-creating grazing marsh on 35 ha of arable land, breeding birds included 74 pairs of lapwing and the density of wading birds' nests exceeded 3 per ha. Winter counts of wetland birds have increased, with more than 3,000 golden plover and 2,000 lapwing. These areas are beginning to rival the North Norfolk Coast for birdwatching and HLS agreements include all-ability access routes and hides. In addition to the valuable bird habitats supported by the extensive wet grasslands, the intersecting, permanently-wet ditches support water voles, eels, dragonflies and greater water-parsnip.

Lapwing chick, Margaret Holland

## Continuing loss of wildlife-rich grassland

Despite the Project's efforts, the future of Lincolnshire's grazing marshes looks bleak. As classic agri-environment agreements expire, financial support for grassland conservation dries up and valuable habitats are put under the plough. The Project cannot achieve its aims without the ability to retain grassland and encourage more farmers to value livestock farming. The current uncertainties of CAP reform, coupled with market trends and potential cuts to Rural Development budgets, threaten to undermine efforts to create the very ecological networks that will support sustainable farming systems.

## An uncertain future

In Lincolnshire, 116 Countryside Stewardship (CS) agreements will expire in 2013. Some had the option to transfer to HLS but, considering current market trends, the outlook is not good. A further 66 CS agreements will expire in 2014 but there is no contingency plan in place for these farmers, many of whom have committed heavily to the scheme and made major changes to their farming practices. The absence of proactive support for transition threatens to undo the good work that has been done in securing long term commitment from farmers to deliver environmental benefit.

## Recognising the value of permanent grassland

Very urgent action is needed to find ways of making traditional pastoral systems financially viable to the farmer, so that valuable grassland habitats are as productive in terms of income as the areas converted to arable or biomass production. Incentive schemes must recognise the high-value, multiple benefits - for the environment and climate - of permanent grassland within a mosaic of arable land. To achieve this, farmers need continuity of adequate, competitive funding and confidence in long-term support to be able to deliver biodiversity objectives that benefit everyone.



Landowner advice is the key to success



Golden plover numbers have increased



Demonstration events are popular

A *Living Landscape* is a recovery plan for nature championed by The Wildlife Trusts to help create a resilient and healthy environment rich in wildlife and provide ecological security for people. To find out what advice and support is available from a Wildlife Trust near you, visit [wildlifetrusts.org/farming](http://wildlifetrusts.org/farming)

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