



North Meadow

National Nature Reserve

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A traditional hay meadow

North Meadow is an old, flower-rich hay meadow on the northern edge of Cricklade. It lies on the glacial flood plain of the River Thames and the River Churn. The reserve covers an area of 108 acres (44 hectares).

Why is it important?

North Meadow has a great variety of wildflowers and is of international importance as one of the finest examples of a lowland hay meadow in Europe. It is protected as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The meadow also supports Britain's largest population of the



Enjoying the meadow. Stephen Davis/Natural England

snake's head fritillary. This is a beautiful and nationally scarce flower, cultivated varieties of which will be familiar to many gardeners.

Once there were many meadows like this along the upper Thames but very few remain today; most have been destroyed by agricultural 'improvement' or gravel extraction.

How is it managed?

The people of Cricklade have managed North Meadow for hundreds of years. Natural England has owned most of the meadow since the early 1970s, working closely with the Court Leet and residents of Cricklade to ensure this traditional regime continues.

During the winter months the Rivers Thames and Churn frequently flood the meadow. Flooding is vital to the growth of many plants and helps to maintain the great variety of species at North Meadow.





Haymaking at North Meadow. Natural England

During the spring/early summer a hay crop is grown and sold to local farmers. The hay is cut after 1 July when the wildflowers have set seed and has to be removed by 12 August before the meadow becomes too wet for heavy vehicles. Several ancient carved stones positioned at various points across the meadow mark the boundaries separating the different ‘hay lots’.



Boundary stone. Natural England

Following the hay crop, the meadow is used as a common for the inhabitants of Cricklade to graze their livestock until 12 February of the following year. After this the meadow is rested ready for the next year’s hay season.



Marsh marigold. Stephen Davis/Natural England

What to see and when

North Meadow has something to offer almost all year round.

In spring the meadow’s impressive display of snake’s head fritillaries appears, along with bright yellow clusters of marsh marigold and the pink of cuckooflower. Also at this time of year, if you look closely, you will see the diminutive adder’s tongue fern and the first of the early marsh orchids.



Wildflowers at North Meadow. Stephen Davis/Natural England



By June, North Meadow bursts into colour with hay meadow flowers. The rich purples of greater burnet and common knapweed contrast with the yellows of cowslip, meadow buttercup and yellow rattle, while the rest of the meadow is filled with ox-eye daisies, meadow rue and meadow sweet.

There are also over 20 species of grass, including crested dog's tail and yellow oat grass.

Plants are not the only attraction at North Meadow. In the summer months many interesting insects are to be seen buzzing around the beautiful hay meadow flowers, including brightly coloured burnet moths, dramatic blue damselflies and a host of beetles.

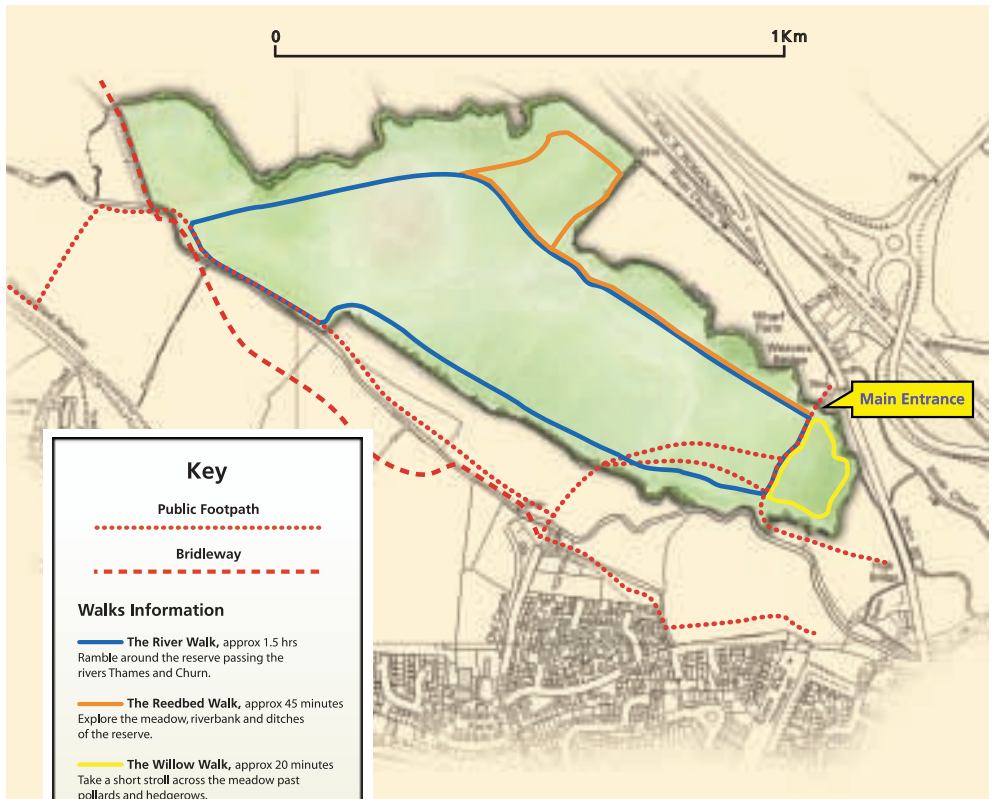


Banded demoiselle. Stephen Davis/Natural England

Throughout the year the meadow and its boundary hedges are filled with bird life. In spring, skylarks make nests amongst the grass, while in the hedges and tree hollows, great tits, blue tits, chaffinches, linnets and tree creepers settle in. Along the banks of the Rivers Thames and Churn, reed buntings, grey wagtails and sedge warblers can be found, with swallows, sand martins and swifts dancing overhead. In winter the meadow is visited by a variety of wading birds.

Reed bunting.
Mike Richards/RSPB





North Meadow is about 20 minutes walk north west of Cricklade town centre. Car parking and bus links can be found in the town, from where the reserve can be reached by public footpaths.

North Meadow is one of a suite of National Nature Reserves across the whole country. They were established to protect the most important areas of wildlife habitat and geological formations in Britain.

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This is one of a range of publications published by:

Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Bristol Team
Natural England
Prince Maurice Court
Hambleton Avenue
Devizes
Wiltshire SN10 2RT

Tel: 01380 726344

Natural England works for people, places and nature to conserve and enhance biodiversity, landscapes and wildlife in rural, urban, coastal and marine areas. We conserve and enhance the natural environment for its intrinsic value, the wellbeing and enjoyment of people, and the economic prosperity it brings.

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Printed on Evolution Satin, 75% recycled post-consumer waste paper, elemental chlorine free.

ISBN 1 8576 840 2

Catalogue code ST10.6



Designed and printed by statusdesign.co.uk

Front cover image: North Meadow. Stephen Davis/Natural England