

## **Foster's Green Meadows National Nature Reserve (Foster's Green and Eades Meadows) – a summary of the management plan**

### **Brief Description**

Foster's Green Meadows National Nature Reserve (NNR) is owned by Worcestershire Wildlife Trust. Foster's Green Meadows were purchased in 1981. Eades Meadow was originally purchased from the Hanbury Parochial charities in 1971 by the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves (now the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts) and leased to Worcestershire Wildlife Trust until 1998, when it formally passed into the Trust's possession. Foster's Green Meadows NNR is located in the district of Wychavon near the village of Hanbury. It is approximately 8km north east of Droitwich at grid reference SO 978 649.

The reserve, a total of 9 hectares, comprises 6 separate fields plus an additional compartment that the bridleway runs through. The site is notable as one of the most floristically rich sites in the country, with an average of 40 species per square metre in Eades Meadow and between 20-30 in the smaller pastures. The sward is predominated by herbs rather than grasses in places, which leads to further botanical diversity.

Throughout much of Eades Meadow and parts of Foster's Green the grassland community corresponds to National Vegetation Classification type MG5 crested dog's tail/knapweed, with sub-communities of meadow vetchling and lady's bedstraw subject to the predominant soil conditions, which vary markedly within short distances across the reserve. The result of this variation leads to distinct zones, partially dependent on the topography as well as the soil, with both ridge and furrow and drainage having a marked effect on the presence of certain species. The total number of species associated with the MG5 community type numbers over 150 and includes both national and county declining species such as fragrant orchid, meadow saffron, common twayblade, adder's-tongue fern and green-winged orchid.

Eades Meadow has a central row of mature oaks and scattered orchard trees. There is a band of false oat grass grassland around the field margin and patches around trees and where trees have been in the recent past in Eades Meadow. Where this grassland occurs on the lower lying parts of the meadow, meadowsweet is very prominent. A minor stream flows across the reserve and along part of the north east boundary. A small marsh is located on the extreme north east corner of Eades Meadow, adjacent to the minor stream.

The four Fosters' Green fields are closer to the NVC community MG6 perennial rye-grass/crested dog's tail with white clover abundant. Again there are variations within this due to waterlogging in areas which support frequent jointed rush and hairy sedge. Small patches of dock (broad-leaved and curled docks) and creeping thistle also occur here where supplementary feeding once took place. Thickets at the north-west end of these fields are characteristic of blackberry and Yorkshire fog scrub. There are five small ponds situated around the field perimeters.

The reserve is a National Nature Reserve and all the fields were designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest in 1971. The site is within the Trust's Forest of Feckenham Living Landscape, one of the best remaining complexes of unimproved neutral grassland in the county, and although it is somewhat isolated from most of the other remaining meadows in this complex it sits within an area dominated by permanent grassland, albeit improved and semi-improved. It lies within Natural England's Severn and Avon Vales national character area.

Due to the sensitivity of the grassland to repeated trampling access is via the Public Right of Way and our permissive path mowed in Eades Meadow in May and June.

### **Management Aims**

The primary objective is to maintain the diversity and quality of the meadow.

Secondary aims include maintaining the veteran oaks and traditional fruit trees found within the meadow, pollarding the hedgerow willows in rotation and managing the mature hedgerows to maintain them as wildlife features.

Foster's Green Meadows provide an opportunity for Worcestershire Wildlife Trust to showcase their work in nature conservation. This National Nature Reserve is one of the finest neutral lowland unimproved meadows remaining in the UK today. The meadows have a long history of sympathetic management and are a fine example of traditional agricultural systems co-existing with wildlife for a richer countryside.

### **Rationale**

The meadow is a national nature reserve and is one of the highest quality neutral grassland sites within the country. Worcestershire holds around 20% of the remaining grassland resource.

### **Summary of Management**

Grassland areas:

- Carry out late hay after 7<sup>th</sup> July to prevent a deterioration of the sward while allowing meadow plants to seed
- Carry out aftermath grazing, removing the stock by 31<sup>st</sup> November each year
- Record the hay cut date, duration of grazing and livestock numbers annually.
- Issue an annual Herbage Agreement to a local grazier.
- Control injurious weeds to prevent them occupying more than 5% of the sward.
- Monitor the grassland to assess management.
- Manage hedge boundaries to maintain them as valuable wildlife features.

General:

- Maintain site infrastructure