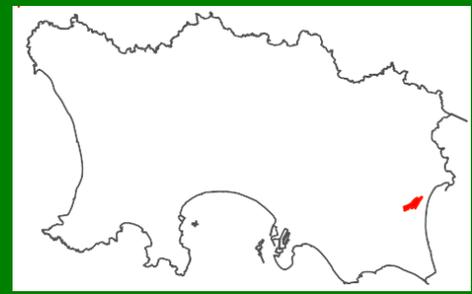


# Grouville Marsh

## Site of Special (Ecological) Interest



### Introduction

Grouville Marsh Site of Special Interest (also sometimes known as Les Maltières) occupies 16 hectares of almost flat basin, between Queens Valley Reservoir and Gorey Common, which is fed mainly by a stream originating from the reservoir.

It is a wonderful marshland made up of natural glades, managed reed beds, drainage ditches, willow coppice and grassland, and which is considered by local naturalists to be one of the most important wetland areas in the island.

The site was designated as an SSI in 2009 in recognition of the uncommon habitats found there and the rare species they harbour. Also, the position of the site close to the east coast is important as large numbers of birds migrate west of the Cherbourg peninsula and a proportion of these find their way to Jersey and to Grouville Marsh to rest, feed or overwinter.



*Garganey*

The site is in multiple private ownership and includes the National Trust for Jersey and other landowners who collectively manage the site with nature conservation being a priority. A large proportion of the SSI forms part of the Commune du Fief de la Reine held by the Crown, and to which certain rights are held by Chef Tenants within the

### History

Rights held by the Chef Tenants to Crown land within the site is linked to property ownership within the parish of Grouville and dates back to medieval times and include grazing cattle on the common, and harvesting reeds and wood from the marsh for thatching and fuel. Today, the primary objective for the landowners is to ensure that the land is protected for its conservation values and public enjoyment.

Although the marsh has undergone many changes and has reduced in size over its history, the current vegetation structure is believed to be similar to the way it would have looked over 6000 years ago; covered in willow and alder woodland, as well as areas of wet meadows.



*Long-winged Conehead*

During the occupation of World War II, Grouville Marsh was home to one of the occupying force's forced labour camps, known as Lager Wick. The camp was built in 1942 and was made up of eleven wooden barrack blocks. The camp was run by the Organisation Todt and housed men from France, North Africa and Spain. The workers were engaged in loading sand from the nearby dunes for use in the concrete constructions across the Island.

Up until the 17<sup>th</sup> century grazing livestock was the primary land use where residents of the local settlement would have put their sheep, horses and cattle. The common also provided tenants with bracken and gorse which they harvested for use as animal bedding and fuel.

By May 1945 most of the huts had been broken up for firewood. Today all that is left of this camp are the two concrete gateposts and a couple of foundations. The marsh also provided a source of fuel in the form of peat which was dug from several trenches further into the marsh, the scars of which can still be found in the undergrowth.

## Management

Managing this area aims at maintaining a patchwork of different vegetation types of varying age and structure. Small parcels of woodland, reed and scrub are rotationally cut and cleared as part of this management resulting in a patchwork of open and shaded ground with interspersed transient ponds and grassland. Seasonal reed cutting, willow management, wet meadow hay cutting and grazing are all employed to achieve the desired habitats across the site. Much of this work in recent years has been supported by the Countryside Enhancement Scheme, designed to reward initiatives to look after Jersey's countryside.



*Azure Damselfly*

Also, typical with wetland management strategies the control of water levels is important throughout the year to allow management during dry periods and flood to enhance the ecological benefits.

## Wildlife



*Yellow Bartsia*

With its location in the east of the Island and the unique mix of different habitats, Grouville Marsh is a hotspot for many of the birds which pass through Jersey on their migration. The willow and reeds help to provide a valuable source of food and shelter for many of the species which can be found in the wetland, while the wet meadows are infused with a wide variety of wildflowers which benefit many insect species. Open reedbeds help to keep the water clean and well oxygenated which, in turn, provides suitable living conditions for more sensitive species such as **Dragonflies** and **Sticklebacks**. The fringes of the wetland also provide homes for some of Jersey's small mammals such as the **Jersey Bank Vole** and the **Lesser White-toothed Shrew**, a diminutive shrew which is found on mainland

Europe and North Africa but not in Great Britain.

The wetlands also provide a home for both the **Azure damselfly** which has a one year life cycle, most of which is spent in the larval stage amongst underwater vegetation, and the **Long Winged Conehead**, one of the smaller bush crickets, named after its pointed head.

Perhaps the best known residents at the marsh are the birds, especially the visiting and overwintering ducks and geese including **Garganey**, which feeds in shallow ponds, filtering small particles of food from the water. The reedbeds also offer a welcome stopover for some rare birds. There have been over 110 different kinds of bird recorded at the marsh and only this month for the very first time in Jersey, a **Pallas's Leaf Warbler** was seen here, whose breeding grounds are in the taiga coniferous forests of Siberia and Mongolia. Also this month a **Dusky Warbler** was seen, the first record for this bird in the island since 2001.

The mix of habitats supports a rich array of different plants including the nationally rare **Galingale**, a member of the sedge family and closely related to papyrus. Other plants of note found here include the **Tufted Forget-me-not**. Stories and myths involving Forget-me-nots first took place in Germany, and the English name derived from the German term Vergissmeinnicht was in use by the beginning of the 1400 century. Also **Yellow Bartsia** grows here, a hemiparasitic plant of grassland habitats which while possessing chlorophyll is partially parasitic on the roots of host plants



*Tufted Forget-me-not*

## Visiting

| If travelling by bus from St Helier board routes 1, 1a or 13 to Gorey Village.

Similar to other wetland SSI's, because the site is so wet for a large part of the year, providing visitor access is difficult apart from to the outer perimeter, where ground conditions allow. There are paths which cross the meadow areas and pass through willow copses from where you can experience a taste of the naturalness the site has to offer.



*Reed Warbler*

## Photo credits

Anne Haden: Tufted Forget-me-not, Yellow Bartsia  
Tim Ransom: Long-winged Conehead, Azure Damselfly  
Romano da Costa: Garganey, Reed warbler

Author: Tim Liddiard



**Biodiversity**