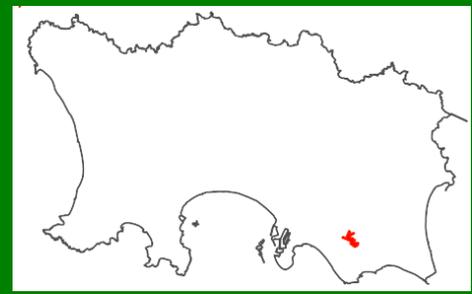


# La Rue des Prés

## Site of Special (Ecological) Interest



### Introduction

La Rue des Prés is one of the Island's lesser well known areas valued for nature conservation. The site covers an area of 13.5ha and includes a reed bed surrounded by a mix of wet grassland meadows, some of which are among the finest examples of this habitat in Jersey. Wetlands are uncommon across the Island and this alone makes the site rather special, providing a home to a number of scarcely found animals and plants.

Being one of the few extensive low lying marshes in Jersey, particularly those lying close to the coast and that have not been drained for agriculture, has helped to maintain its species richness. The majority of the site is privately owned and this, alongside the tendency for seasonal flooding means that there are no maintained paths and public access is not provided for as yet, although the long term goal is to make an amount of access available. The vegetation across the meadows is very dense during the summer months and nature is able to go about its business undisturbed amongst the inaccessible undergrowth.



*Marsh thistle*

### History

Being the last remaining fragment of the once far more extensive Longueville marsh, a complex of marshland stretching from St Helier through Samares, Bagot, Longueville and La Mare, this area used to be known as Les Prés Dormants (sleeping meadows) and during surveys of Jerseys' wet meadows in 1993 and 1998 was identified as being very rich in wet meadow species, many of which are rare in Jersey and the British Isles.



*Bullfinch*

Most of the Island's low lying wet meadows have been reclaimed through drainage for agriculture and development over the last two centuries. This together with the use of herbicides and fertilisers on agricultural land has led to the loss of many of the characteristic plant species of wet meadows. La Rue des Prés has received very few agricultural inputs in the past and because of this still retains its ecological interest.

### Management

- 1) Reed cutting: Commercial reed beds are normally cut on an annual or biennial cutting regime to gather reeds for thatching, but in conservation managed reed beds longer rotations may be used to provide suitable habitat for specific nesting birds and to maintain overwinter habitats for many invertebrates. The reeds are therefore cut on a rotation which is very dependable on preceding weather and water levels. Cuttings are burnt in situ as removing them from site would be too difficult.

The ditches that run around the reed bed are also of value to wildlife and these are also cut and cleared of obstructions to prevent litter build up to maintain their flow

2) Water level control: By managing the amount of water retained in the meadows at various times of the year certain animals and plants can benefit from the conditions provided. Using sluice gates, the speed by which water is allowed to escape from the site can be controlled. A typical management cycle would be to increase water retention during the winter months to favour overwintering wildfowl (ducks, geese and wading birds) and to dry out the meadows a little in preparation for grazing in the early spring and perhaps again in the late autumn.



*Whinchat*

- 3) Willow management: Much of the wooded areas on site consist of willow for which the most effective management tool is to coppice individual trees. Rotational willow coppicing is carried out every 5-7 years and has been shown to invigorate fresh growth, open up the ground storey to sunlight and provide a useful early-season nectar source for bees
- 4) Grassland management or hay cut: The meadows are cut during August or September after the majority of flowers have set seed. 'Islands' of vegetation are left uncut to provide overwintering invertebrates with cover. The principle behind hay cutting is to remove nutrients from the meadow and to maintain a healthy level of competition within the meadow flora, keeping more dominant species at bay and increasing biodiversity.
- 5) Grazing: Ideally the meadows should be grazed at least once between October and early March by either cattle, sheep or ponies in low density. The introduction of grazing and the time that animals should be in the meadows should be based on vegetation height. Ideally by late February the vegetation should be short to encourage spring regrowth and to avoid plants such as orchids from being smothered out later in the spring.

## Wildlife

The meadows provide one of the only two remaining sites in Jersey for the '**Jersey' Orchid** or **Lax-Flowered Orchid** and one of the few known sites for **Marsh Speedwell**. Other species of rare or of restricted distribution such as **Common Spike-Rush**, **Water Purslane** and **Water Forget-Me-Not**, otherwise known as 'Scorpion-grass' because of the curved tail at the end of its stems, have also been recorded here.

The area has a great abundance of invertebrates, particularly wetland species including the **Golden-Ringed Dragonfly**, one of Britain's largest dragonfly species and a voracious predator, sometimes known to eat other dragonflies. They grow very



*Little egret*



*Marsh bedstraw*

slowly and the larvae may spend as long as five years at the bottom of streams before they emerge to turn into a dragonfly. Another invertebrate of note here is the rare **Ashy Furrow Bee** which also has a stronghold at Le Petit Pré SSI in Trinity.

The island's largest heron and egret roost exists on the eastern boundary of the site with large numbers of **Grey Herons** and **Little Egrets** recorded. The reed beds harbour populations of breeding birds, notably **Reed Warbler**, **Cetti's Warbler** and **Marsh Harrier** and is also important for roosting **Swallows** and **House Martins**.

The site is also an important refuge for passage migrants and winter visitors including **Purple Heron**, and is a regular roost for



**Reed Buntings, Pied Wagtail, Whinchat and Sedge Warblers** which have undertaken their journey from sub-Saharan Africa to be here. Importantly, a remnant eastern population of **Grass Snakes** inhabit the area and are occasionally seen; another reason for leaving areas of vegetation uncut to provide cover. Recently, the locally rare anadromous (they live in seawater but breed in fresh or brackish water) fish, the **Three-Spined Stickleback** has been recorded in the streams at Rue des Prés. The male of this species shows great paternal qualities, both by building a nest and guarding the eggs, aerating them by fanning with his pectoral fins.

## Visiting

Opportunities for the casual visitor are not provided for and there are no formal access routes across the site. Walking along La Blinerie, however, can be very rewarding with sightings of many of the animals mentioned and from where the atmosphere offered by this beautiful site can be sampled. If travelling by bus from St Helier board route 2 to Rue des Prés Estate. If travelling by car or bicycle there is a small car park on site with bicycle racks available.



*Golden-ringed Dragonfly*

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## Photo credits

Anne Haden: Water mint, Marsh bedstraw, Marsh thistle

Romano da Costa: Little Egret, Whinchat, Bullfinch

Tim Ransom: Golden-ringed dragonfly

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