

The purchase and restoration of a traditional fenland landscape at Willow Tree Fen in South Holland is increasing Lincolnshire's remaining fenland by 200%.

It will help a range of wildlife including rare aquatic plants, insects, fish, otters, water voles and birds, such as lapwing, redshank, snipe and marsh harrier.

Less than 1% of Lincolnshire's wild fenland remains. The special plants and animals associated with these lost wetlands are now rare or threatened with local extinction.



Baston Fen nature reserve (Geoff Trinder)

The last remnants of the wild fenlands in Lincolnshire cover just 55 hectares within two nature reserves: Baston Fen and Thurlby Fen. These reserves shelter the last of Lincolnshire's natural, inland fenland landscapes and some of its special wildlife. But they are too small to support some of the larger fenland birds and animals, and possibly too small to cope with the changing climate.

Critically, the 114 hectares of Willow Tree Fen is linked to these remaining fenland reserves by the River Glen and the wildlife-rich Counter Drain. From those reserves, the fenland species will be able to colonise.

Willow Tree Fen nature reserve

114.00 hectares (282.00 acres)
Situated between Bourne and Spalding,
south of the River Glen on the
Tongue End to Pode Hole road.

The entrance bridge is at
grid ref TF 181213.

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Registered charity no. 218895.

Cover photo: Lapwing (Geoff Trinder)

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Willow Tree Fen nature reserve

Restoring a Lincolnshire fenland landscape for wildlife and people



Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust



Willow Tree Fen

Witness the development of an exciting new nature reserve with a diverse and wildlife-rich landscape of reedbeds, shallow meres, seasonally flooded pastures and hay meadows.

Hairy dragonfly (Dean Eades)



Orange Tip (Les Blims)

Alongside the huge benefits for wildlife, Willow Tree Fen will provide access and activities that will encourage learning, exploration and discovery of the natural, cultural and historical features of this traditional landscape.

Work has been on-going since the purchase of the land in 2009.

Drainage and ditches

With support from the Environment Agency ditches and dykes have been connected together and overgrown ditches cleared of choking vegetation.

The connectivity of these wet 'highways' is vital for the health of the future aquatic population of Willow Tree Fen, including eels and other fish species and aquatic invertebrates such as dragonflies and diving beetles.



Meadows and grassland

The 7 hectare dry field has been established as a wildflower-rich hay meadow. The mix of flower and grass seeds will attract insects such as bees and butterflies feeding on the nectar.

90 acres is being developed as fen grassland and has been sown with a mix of seven different grass species suitable for wet fenland conditions. Green hay from Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust reserves Baston Fen and Sotby Meadows has been spread on the site to increase the diversity of plants.

Across the site, fencing has been installed to enable sheep and cattle grazing.



John Redshaw

Archaeological surveys

Prior to the restoration and re-wetting of Willow Tree Fen, archaeologists investigated the site.

In January 2010, over 120 visitors helped a team from Heritage Lincolnshire's Archaeological Project Services carry out a geophysical survey, field-walk the site, auger test deposits and dig test pits. Four trenches were dug crossing the site of a Roman drainage ditch.

The fieldwalking yielded two new Iron Age/Roman saltmaking sites and a selection of Roman domestic pottery.

Heritage Consultants Andrew and Annelise Fielding made a prehistoric kiln and demonstrated open pan saltmaking reflecting the use of the site in the Roman period.



lapwing • golden plover • redshank • oystercatcher • brown hare • azure damselfly • marsh harrier • snipe
curlew • hairy dragonfly • skylark • yellowhammer • buzzard • reed bunting • mute swan • variable damselfly