



## Habitat Management: Restoration of Marsh and Reed Bed Habitats



Historically, Fritton Lake once had extensive reed beds adjacent to its shores. These were once the home of bitterns, warblers, dragonflies and other insects. Unfortunately, a combination of factors, including changes in water quality, improvements in



agriculture, habitat succession, invasion by exotic species and subsequent shading, has all contributed to the loss of this habitat. This has resulted in the reduction of many specialised species that depend upon the reedbed, and if left unchecked, these would disappear from our fragile ecosystem forever.



The problem at Fritton is quite a large one: The lake is some 3 miles in length, and contains in excess of 7 miles of shoreline. Various techniques have been employed to combat the different problems in the different areas:.



# Rhododendron Control



Rhododendron is being managed as part of a long term plan to restore areas of woodland and reed beds which are valuable habitats for native plants and animals.

Rhododendron is an invasive species that was introduced by the Victorians for their gardens and pleasure grounds.

It grows very vigorously, and quickly shades out native plants and flowers. It has no natural predators, and quickly spreads into new areas, by producing thousands of seeds from its large flowers. It also produces dense shade from its leaves, which, when they decompose change the acidity of the soil, preventing of plants from growing there.

We have been awarded grant aid from the Norfolk Non-Native Species Initiative to help control Rhododendron, and have been removing the Rhododendron along the margins of the lake. In some places, the plants have been flailed, with a follow up treatment of pulling seedlings, with some success. Elsewhere the plants have been winched out, cut up and burnt, and any regrowth chemically sprayed. Here are photos of our work:



An area of 300m<sup>2</sup> of Rhododendron was selected that had encroached areas along the shore of the lake.



Now cleared, we will allow reed and native communities to develop, and control new Rhododendron growth.

# Managing Succession

Succession is the natural process through which natural habitats develop. In the UK, if humans disappeared tomorrow, within 100 years vast areas of land would quickly develop into scrub, then birch forest, and finally oak and yew woodland.

Succession is kept at bay by coppicing, grazing and other traditional skills. In the photographs below, it is possible to see what can happen when grazing is removed from an area, over a space of 60 years:



As result of succession, important wildflower and reed bed habitats have been lost to secondary woodland. If all lakeside habitats were allowed to develop in this way many important species of bird and insects would be lost. Therefore to counter the effects of succession, we have been coppicing the lakeside alder and birch, with the aim of creating a mosaic of habitats, some similar to that seen in 1950, and some areas of younger scrub, suitable for nesting birds.

Through rotational clearing of small areas, it is possible to keep a habitat in a young stage of succession, thereby preserving the reed bed and open habitat, whilst still permitting natural colonisation and development.

Our work is supported by the Broads Authority, Norfolk Wildlife Trust and Natural England. Whilst sometimes this work may look destructive, we ensure that very little wildlife is disturbed, by undertaking our activities when most are hibernating, and we monitor the recovery of the area, to measure the populations of returning species.