

COUNTY: NORFOLK

SITE NAME: ROSIE CURSTON'S MEADOW,  
MATTISHALL

DISTRICT: BRECKLAND

Local Planning Authority: Breckland District Council

National Grid Reference: TG 041124

Area: 2.33 (ha.) 5.75 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 133

1:10,000: TG 01 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1994

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

New site.

Reasons for Notification:

Rosie Curston's Meadow is a small unimproved calcareous clay pasture, grazed by cattle, with some scattered scrub and surrounded by mature hedgerows, set in an area mostly under arable. The attractive herb-rich grassy sward is predominantly mesotrophic being developed on soils derived from the East Anglian boulder clay which are neutral to calcareous in character.

The grassland is the meadow vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis* variant of the crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* -- black knapweed *Centaurea nigra* community. In Norfolk as a whole, such meadows are rare. They are generally small and vary tremendously in quality, with the majority being rank and species poor. Rosie Curston's Meadow is the only one of its type presently in the SSSI series in East Norfolk managed as pasture and there are no comparable sites known in West Norfolk.

The sward is composed of over sixty grassland species. The particular sub-community found here is characterised by the grasses red fescue *Festuca rubra*, Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*, perennial rye-grass *Lolium perenne*, crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, along with glaucous sedge *Carex flacca* and the herbs black knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, common cat's-ear *Hypochaeris radicata*, ox-eye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, daisy *Bellis perennis* and meadow buttercup *Ranunculus acris*. Hard rush *Juncus inflexus* occurs in the damper areas.

Members of the pea family are a feature of this sub-community and include meadow vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis*, bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, red clover *Trifolium pratense* and white clover *T. repens*. Rosette species, including rough hawkbit *Leontodon hispidus*, hoary plantain *Plantago media* and bulbous buttercup *Ranunculus bulbosus*, are also prominent. Other characteristic species are fairy flax *Linum catharticum*, lady's bedstraw *Galium verum*, cuckooflower *Cardamine pratensis* and wild carrot *Daucus carota*.

The meadow supports five locally rare plants; green-winged orchid *Orchis morio*, present here as many thousands of flowering spikes in one of its largest populations in Norfolk. Adder's-tongue *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, found in the furrows of old plough lines; Bee Orchid *Ophrys apifera*, which fluctuates in numbers from year to year, twayblade *Listera ovata* and yellow rattle *Rhinanthus minor*. It also supports a large population of common spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*.

The management history of the meadow is well documented. It was cultivated in the early part of this century, in common with the majority of farmland in this area of Norfolk. Owing to the nature of the soil, the south-eastern end escaped cultivation, leaving its previous grassland community intact. Old plough furrows are visible on the 1946 aerial photograph on the western half of the meadow. The field was returned to grass in 1940 and subsequently lightly grazed with cattle. The grazing regime has consisted of year-round grazing with three cows, which are removed each night to sheds. The combination of the lack of agricultural improvement, and this pattern of stock management has resulted in nutrient-poor soil, allowing the exceptional flora to flourish.