

Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust

Sow Dale



Location & Access

OS: 122 • **GR:** TF 349 666 • 34.00ha (84.00 acres) • Freehold 1986

Habitat type: Grassland

The access to Lower Sow Dale is close to Old Bolingbroke, from the Spilsby road at TF 352 653. Upper Sow Dale was designated a Sanctuary Area in 2014 with no public access. The area will be managed for conservation with reduced levels of disturbance for wildlife.

Description & Management

Sow Dale is the most extensive of the dales that fret the Spilsby Sandstone country of the southern Wolds. For centuries it has formed an important access to the hills from the fenland country to the south; the famous prehistoric site of Hall Hill overlooks the entrance to it, and by the Middle Ages it was guarded by John of Gaunt's great castle at Old Bolingbroke. Until the early 1980s the Dale had survived in traditional usage of meadow, pasture and woodland, but recently more intensive farming has converted large areas of it to arable cropping, with consequent loss of landscape and wildlife interest.

The Trust's reserve consists of a meadow and woodland in the upper part of the Dale and a block of some 23.5 hectares (58 acres) of pasture in lower Sow Dale immediately adjacent to Old Bolingbroke. There are some fine old hedges, and willow and alder carr alongside the stream. Common spotted orchid, ragged-robin and fleabane are among the flowers of the grassland; kingcups make a bold splash of colour in April in the spring-line flushes on the valley sides where the sandstone meets the Kimmeridge Clay below it. In the

carr the stands of giant horsetail resemble a coal measure forest and the branching marsh thistles grow to 6 feet or more. Both species of golden saxifrage (alternate-leaved and opposite-leaved) grow in shady places by the stream, and in the open there are water forget-me-not and brooklime. Badgers are regular in the Dale and there is a varied bird fauna. Kestrel, sparrowhawk, barn and tawny owls, snipe, and green and great spotted woodpeckers are all resident. Garden,

grasshopper and sedge warblers, blackcap, whitethroat and lesser whitethroat, and spotted flycatcher are summer visitors. The common grassland butterflies are usually abundant.

The grassland is grazed by sheep and/or cattle. Invasion by rushes has to be controlled. A woodland management programme is designed to maintain the ash wood and the alder/willow carr.

