

This Species Action Plan sets out to maintain and improve southern marsh orchid populations on Caravan Club-owned sites, and has been drafted for Club Site Teams and Site Wardens. It provides background information on the southern marsh orchid and makes recommendations on sympathetic habitat management for this species.

Introduction

Derived from the Greek name Orkhis, the orchid family is one of the largest within the plant kingdom, incorporating over 20, 000 different species worldwide. The southern marsh orchid is an arresting and attractive species and is one of the largest British orchid species.

The Caravan Club audit 2006 revealed that 63 Club sites may support this species

How to recognise this species

- Between 20 cm and 70 cm in height.
- Varying petal colour from pale pink or lilac to rosy-purple or dark magenta.
- Leaves are between 10 - 20 cm wide, flat and usually unspotted. The greyish-green basal leaves form a cluster of between five and nine leaves
- The upper sepal petals of each flower form a loose hood
- The flower lip is broad and may even be spoon shaped, it is three lobed and will often display a pale central area marked with small dots, speckles or dashes
- The spur is very stout, finger shaped and is sometimes curved downwards



Credit: Philip Corney

Current status

- Although there is no specific legal protection for the southern marsh orchid, UK conservation law protects all wild plants against picking and uprooting
- Factors causing loss or decline:
 - Drainage and development on suitable land has drastically reduced the number of favourable habitats remaining for this species
 - Where herbivorous animals are present, it is likely that this species will suffer negative impacts from grazing
 - Natural succession can also work against the southern marsh orchid, with neglect or abandonment of low intensity grassland management leading to scrub encroachment

Ecology/management requirements

Habitat: The southern marsh orchid avoids truly acidic soils but can be found in a variety of soil types in fens, wet meadows, dune slacks, calcareous marshes and road verges. Occasionally recorded in dry areas such as chalk downs, but rarely persisting. It flowers from early June to mid-July with pollination aided by the large skipper *Ochlodes venata*.

How to look after this species

	Site safeguard and management	Species management and protection
DO'S	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DO Identify <u>suitable habitat</u> to support this species and undertake <u>management</u> required to <u>enhance</u> these areas DO <u>Reduce mowing regime</u> in suitable habitat areas and <u>mow only once the flowers have seeded and died back</u> DO Ensure <u>key sites</u> for this species are <u>safeguarded</u> by fencing DO Maintain the number and distribution of sites by <u>promoting favourable management</u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DO Seek to encourage <u>natural dispersal</u> of the species DO <u>Survey</u> all former and potential sites for southern marsh orchid within 5 years DO <u>Reintroduce or translocate</u> southern marsh orchids to suitable sites DO Provision and <u>safeguard</u> suitable sites DO <u>Establish plants</u> at some sites specifically for public viewing and interpretation DO Also establish plants away from public access areas
DON'TS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DON'T <u>Mow or strim</u> in suitable habitat areas during the growing season (Feb-Sept) DON'T <u>Drain, develop or allow grazing</u> on suitable areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DON'T Remove plants for translocation without permission from the statutory authorities (Natural England, Scottish Natural Heritage, Countryside Council for Wales)

For further information on this species visit:

The Caravan Club Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) for southern marsh orchid: <http://www.caravanclub.co.uk>

Britain's Orchids: <http://www.britainSORCHIDS.fieldguide.co.uk>

Birmingham and the Black Country LBAP: <http://www.wildlifetrust.org.uk/urbanwt/ecorecord/bap/html/orchid.htm>