

## BURWELL FEN FARM ADDED TO WICKEN FEN

In October 2001, the National Trust acquired 415 acres of land adjacent to its reserve at Wicken Fen. This represents a significant step forward in the expansion plans for Wicken Fen, adding to the land owned by the National Trust at Wicken by almost 50%. The acquisition of Burwell Fen Farm is important for maintaining species viability and diversity at Wicken Fen, and it provides an opportunity to restore former fenland to its traditional state. The land was wetland, covered mostly by reeds until drainage during World War II.

Moreover, the purchase of Burwell Fen Farm, represents the reuniting of Adventurers' Fen north of Burwell Lode (NT-owned for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) with Adventurers' Fen South, the Adventurers' Fen described by Eric Ennion. Both areas were among the last in the fens to be drained, but while the northern section was handed back to the National Trust after the war and restored for wildlife, the southern section remained in cultivation.



*The Mere and reedbeds on Adventurers' Fen give us an idea of what Burwell Fen may look like in the future.*

National Trust members, including all those living in the local area. To date it has raised £336,000 to be used for the land purchase and work thereafter. Plans have been drawn up together with DEFRA to restore the land via the Countryside Stewardship Programme. The new area of land will be known as Burwell Fen from now on.

### Work so far...

Work has started on the reprofiling of the ditches within the area, to make them less steep-sided, and therefore more wildlife-friendly. One of the Internal Drainage Board ditches, which carries water from other farmland to the Cam at Upware, has been re-aligned so that it is not now draining from the Burwell Fen site. (The IDB is the body that oversees all drainage work of farmland in the wider area from the Cam to the edge of the fen) A local contractor has been used for this work.

### And into the future...

After the ditching work is completed, water controls will be fitted onto the internal ditches to prevent the loss of too much water into the wider IDB system – thus rewetting the fields owned by the National Trust. 2003 will see some fencing being put into place, in readiness for the introduction of grazing within the next 2 years.

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*Eric Ennion's view of Adventurers' Fen in the 1930s*

Including the costs to convert the area to wetland, and endowment, Burwell Fen Farm cost £1.7 million to acquire. The National Trust is extremely grateful to all its supporters and partners for their help in enabling us to make this significant addition to Wicken Fen.

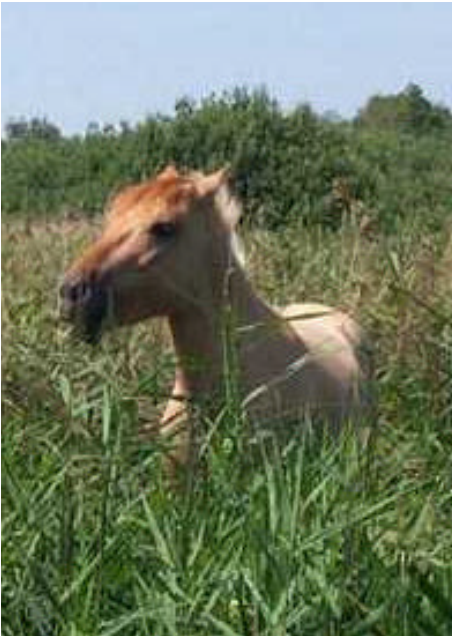
A grant of £933,500 from the Heritage Lottery Fund provided the bulk of the funding, with other moneys from National Trust funds, Cambridgeshire County Council, WREN and an anonymous donor from New Zealand. The National Trust launched an appeal, with a mailing sent to selected

Supported by the National Lottery through the  
**Heritage Lottery Fund**



## Konigs

These small horses are the nearest living equivalent to the Tarpan, the original European wild horse. They are ideally suited to wet conditions and need very little human attention. Large herds are used on Polish and Dutch nature reserves; in Britain they can be found on the Broads and other reserves such as Redgrave and Lopham Fen.



In July 2001, the National Trust brought them to Wicken Fen, to help in the management of an area of the old Sedge Fen known as Verrall's Fen. Most of the Sedge Fen is still managed by cutting sedge and litter (meadow hay), as it has been since at least 1419. The Centenary Project currently underway to clear much of the scrub that had encroached on the fen, means that grazing is now necessary on some areas, to make the clearance work sustainable. With the konigs in place, they simply munch their way through new small scrub and shrub growth to keep the fen habitat open.

As the Fen expands, the option to graze wet grassland is an at-

tractive one. A new group of konigs will be introduced to the area around the Mere on Adventurers' Fen in 2003, and more to Guinea Hall Fen in 2004. Up until now, the horses on site have been geldings (with one mare) – but we need to move more horses down from the Broads every time we wish to increase their numbers. Breeding animals will therefore soon be brought onto site.

## Bitterns

One of the rarest birds in the UK, bitterns have been overwintering at Wicken Fen for the last few years. In the last 6 years, the National Trust at Wicken Fen has been one of the partners in an EU Life project aimed at improving habitats for the bittern. There has been, and is still, much work being done on Adventurers' Fen north of Burwell Lode to improve and extend the reedbeds, the bird's favoured habitat. The hope is that eventually a pair will breed on site, perhaps a young pair recently fledged from one of the East Anglian coastal reserves such as Minsmere in Suffolk.

Restoration of Burwell Fen to wetland will be of great importance in the chances for the bittern at Wicken Fen. There are now an extra 415 acres of buffer zone between the Adventurers' Fen reedbeds and the nearest intensive agriculture, and in the long term much of those 415 acres will in themselves be more suitable reedbed habitat for the bittern. The last record of breeding bitterns in the area, in 1938, was actually on Adventurers' Fen, as described by Eric Ennion (the land just acquired by the NT).

One reason behind the plans to expand Wicken Fen to 10,000 acres is to provide alternative habitat in the case of sea level rise swamping many of the North Sea coastal nature reserves. This would be crucial to the survival of breeds such as the bittern, which are under immense pressure even now.

## Bittern

Life Partnership



*(Continued from page 1)*

Cattle will be used first on this area, although the National Trust plans to use konig ponies here in the longer term.

## Guinea Hall Fen

The land purchased in 2000 has undergone very similar work to that now happening on Burwell Fen. There is now a field system in place, with cattle grazing the area 18 months to 2 years ahead of schedule. It is hoped that Wicken Fen's first breeding herd of konig ponies will be brought onto the area in 2004.

## Fund Raising

As well as the major National Trust appeal, the staff at Wicken Fen and in the region have been establishing contacts leading to an array of fund raising efforts.



The Newmarket branch of estate agents Pocock & Shaw has undertaken to donate £50 to the Wicken Fen expansion plans appeal for every house sale completed in a wide area including Burwell, Exning, Fordham, Reach, Soham, Swaffham Prior, Swaffham Bulbeck and Wicken. In January 2003, Ian Shaw and Piers Saunders presented Wicken Fen Property Manager Adrian Colston with a cheque for £1250, raised since the scheme started in February 2002.



On a completely different note, the Fenlanders Harley Owners Group organised a ride around fenland pubs on Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2002, raising money for the Wicken plans as they went. They arrived back at Wicken Fen Visitor

Centre mid-afternoon, with all their bikes of course, and presented a cheque for £500 to Wicken Fen.



## The search for new partners

For this project to succeed, the National Trust needs a wide variety of supporters and partners in the local area.

Thanks to the help of Nigel Brown of NW Brown Group Ltd, a series of lunches was hosted at their offices. Key business leaders from Cambridge were invited to hear about the project for an expanded Wicken Fen, and to lend their support. It is hoped that in the coming months £300K will be raised to help with future acquisitions. Thank you Nigel!

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## WHY DOES THE NATIONAL TRUST WANT TO EXPAND WICKEN FEN TO 10,000 ACRES?

- *To increase fenland habitat in East Anglia by 10 times its current acreage, from less than 0.1% of original East Anglian fenland.*
- *To provide a recreational resource for the people of Cambridgeshire, needed more than ever with current house-building activity*
- *To provide open access to the countryside for all*
- *To secure the survival of hundreds of threatened species of plants and animals*
- *To create new habitats to compensate for expected losses of coastal sites due to sea level rise*
- *To help achieve local and national Biodiversity Targets.*



*Meadowsweet*

*In June 2002, at the Royal Geographic Society, a conference was held to put forward the case for large-scale nature reserves.*

*In the BBC Wildlife Magazine, June 2002, an article by Chris Baines highlighted the necessity for planning for large-scale nature reserves. It states that shallow lakes and ponds, marshy ground and reedbeds were a feature of much of lowland Britain before land drainage, declining for centuries but in only the last 50 years being halved in area. The recreation of wetland habitat can help reduce flooding problems by holding storm water and releasing it slowly; it can help recharge underground water storage and increase the reliability of the water supply. All this in addition to being important for migratory birds, insect life, amphibians and many wildflowers.*

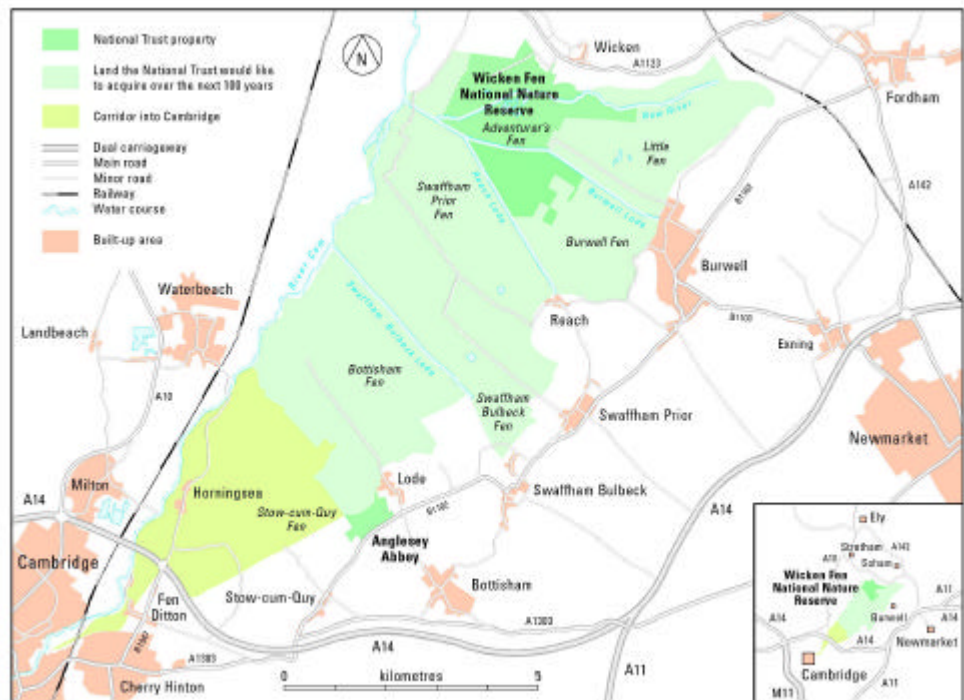
The National Trust  
Wicken Fen NNR  
Lode Lane, Wicken  
Cambridgeshire, CB7 5XP  
01353 720274  
wickenfen@ntrust.org.uk

Registered Charity No: 205846

## THE WICKEN FUTURE FEN PROJECT

The plan for a large-scale nature reserve and open access area adjacent to Wicken Fen now has a name—the Wicken Future Fen Project.

This map gives the target area for conversion from arable farming over the next 100 years, as well as showing the current National Trust land holding.



### FINDING OUT MORE ABOUT WICKEN FEN

There are various books and publications available for finding out about the wildlife, habitats, history and management of Wicken Fen.

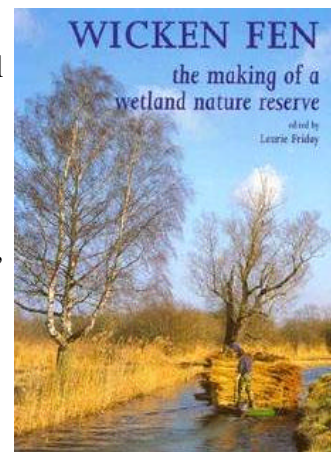
For most visitors the **Trail Guide** provides an easy-to-follow map, with points of interest marked. It has been revised to include the new areas of land acquired. Fully laminated for all-weather use, it costs £1.25.

The **Souvenir Guide** to Wicken Fen was rewritten in 2001, and provides an easy guide to the different habitats of the reserve, as well as lists of what to watch out for. It is fully illustrated, and costs £2.50.

For an in-depth study, choose **Wicken Fen, the making of a wetland nature reserve**, edited by

Laurie Friday, who chairs the Wicken Fen Local Management Committee. It is available in paperback at £19.95, or hardback at £30.00. There is also a Checklist of Species of Wicken Fen, published as an appendix, at £12.50.

These are all available from the Visitor Centre at Wicken Fen, open Tuesday-Sunday, 10am-5pm.



Look on our website at [www.wicken.org.uk](http://www.wicken.org.uk) for information about the species found here, history of the site and future plans, as well as forthcoming events.

On 7<sup>th</sup> June 2003, Wicken Fen will be hosting a one-day conference on the Wicken Future Fen Project, and other large-scale fen restoration and landscape projects. Please look out for details in our events leaflet, or contact us for more information.