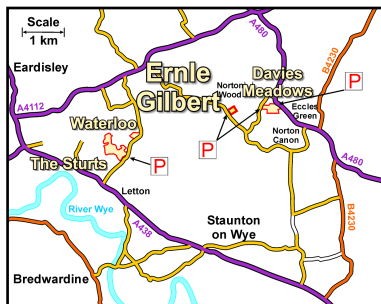


# Ernle Gilbert Meadow

Norton Canon SO364484 (Explorer 201)

Unimproved herb-rich hay meadow



## Visitor Guidelines

While the hay crop is growing in June and July, please keep to the edge of the meadow. Dogs must be kept under control at all times, especially if livestock are present.

## Description

This reserve is a traditional old Herefordshire *hay meadow*, rectangular in shape, and bounded by a series of old and mixed hedges. This type of habitat containing *unimproved* grassland, which has not received any pesticide or fertiliser treatment within living memory, is now extremely rare in the County. The *meadow* is typically very herb-rich, with many species of plants which have largely disappeared elsewhere, e.g. Green-winged and Common Spotted Orchid, Adder's Tongue, and Pepper Saxifrage. Damp hollows on the reserve are marked throughout the year by tussocks of *Juncus spp.* rush, and in summer by bright patches of Ragged Robin. The two main legumes present, Common Bird's Foot Trefoil and Meadow Vetchling, provide larval food-plants for a healthy population of Common Blue butterflies. Until the mid-1990's, Curlew were often seen, and Lapwings used to nest regularly, but the decline in breeding populations of both species since then has meant that even sight records have become scarce.

The shrub-rich hedges bordering the reserve are also of interest. The northern boundary contains suckering Blackthorn, two Oak trees and a very fine old Black Poplar tree. The eastern and southern hedges are kept neatly trimmed but attract Yellow hammers and Whitethroats to breed. Drainage ditches run alongside these hedges and the wetter, southern ditch holds good populations of Fool's Watercress and Great Willow-Herb.

## Present Management

The reserve is managed as an old *hay meadow*, with a hay cut in July/August followed by *aftermath grazing* by sheep or cattle. Management follows guidelines set out under the Countryside Stewardship scheme, which covers this reserve.

### Acquisition Details

Freehold purchased in 1993 with financial help from the Esmee Fairburn Charitable Trust, Herefordshire Conservation Development Trust, and the Ernle Gilbert Memorial Fund. Designated "The Ernle Gilbert Nature Reserve" in memory of the former Trust Chairman.

### General Information:

**Best time to visit:** Spring through to late summer.

**Habitat:** *Unimproved* neutral grassland.

**Size:** 1.9 hectares (4.7 acres).

**Specialities:** Curlew, Lapwing, Yellowhammer, Whitethroat (4-7). Common Blue (4-7), Meadow Brown (6-9) and Ringlet (6-9) butterflies, Six-spot Burnet moth.

Green-winged Orchid (5-6), Common Spotted Orchid (6-8), Ragged Robin (5-8), Pepper Saxifrage (6-9), Adders Tongue (5-8), Burnet Saxifrage (5-9). Black Poplar.

**Parking:** There is limited parking at the entrance to the reserve.

**Nearby HNT reserves:** Davies Meadow, The Sturts, Waterloo.

