



# AVALON MARSHES

## DROUGHT AND FLOODING

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### Fact Sheet

#### Too Much Water; Too Little Water

The Somerset Levels gained national prominence in the winter of 2013/14 when large areas flooded for many weeks. Severe flooding is an ever-present risk across these low-lying areas; it wasn't long ago that some people who lived in the Levels kept a boat tied up outside their house. Arguably, however, winter floods may not be as big a problem as summer droughts. As a rule, most wetland habitats and farming systems are better adapted to deal with flooding than drought.



Image © Nick Sarebi

#### Problems Caused by Severe Flooding

- Flooding of property and major roads can cause financial damage and severe emotional stress.
- Flooded land cannot be used for grazing livestock, decreasing food production and farm income .
- Cereal crops don't tolerate flooding.
- Summer flooding kills grass, destroying that year's hay crop and grazing.
- Some species, such as water voles and terrestrial invertebrates, may drown if they run out of refuge areas above the water.

#### Problems Caused by Severe Drought

- Ditch levels drop, so cattle have little to drink and can escape from the fields.
- Water stops flowing, which can cause pollutants in water to increase in concentration
- Carbon dioxide is released in ever greater volumes as peat soils dry out.
- Many wetland species cannot cope with prolonged periods of drought and have to move or perish.
- Important archaeological remains stored in the peat start to degrade.

#### Flooding Has Its Benefits Too

- Flood waters bring silt which makes fields more fertile.
- Winter floods are important for wintering waterbirds while splashy conditions in spring are vital for breeding waders.

#### Drought Has Its Benefits Too

- Everyone else's grass has shriveled, so that grown on the wetlands is worth more.
- Prolonged dry conditions are usually accompanied by fine weather, which makes us all feel better.
- Drought is great for making us appreciate how important water is, and why we mustn't take it for granted.