

COUNTY: SURREY SITE NAME: EPSOM AND ASHTEAD COMMONS

DISTRICT: EPSOM AND EWELL, MOLE VALLEY

Status: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Local Planning Authority: EPSOM AND EWELL BOROUGH COUNCIL, Mole Valley District Council

National Grid Reference: TQ 181602      Area: Approx. 358 (ha.) approx. 884 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 176, 187    1:10,000: TQ 15 NE, TQ 16 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1955      Date of Last Revision: 1975

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1984      Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Epsom Common is owned and managed as a public open space by Epsom and Ewell Borough Council. The site is of archaeological interest.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

These two commons support a wide diversity of habitat types on the undulating terrain of the London clay. The site carries four nationally rare invertebrates and several others which are uncommon in Surrey. The range of habitats present promotes a rich community of breeding birds.

Variations in drainage and the management history of the commons are chiefly responsible for the diversity of habitats present. The site was once managed by stock grazing but the cessation of this activity has led to a natural succession from rough grassland to scrub, and finally to woodland. The present areas of open grassland are maintained by natural factors such as fire and rabbit grazing, and scrub clearance. Woodland dominates approximately half of the site and is variable in age and composition. The Stew Pond and the adjacent recently restored Great Pond (at TQ 184607) date from mediaeval times; smaller woodland ponds and a stream are also present.

Grassland in the southern parts of the site, and around Stew and Great Ponds, lies on poorly drained ground and is dominated by tussock grass *Deschampsia cespitosa* with cocksfoot *Dactylis glomerata*, marsh fox-tail *Alopecurus geniculatus* and rushes *Juncus* species. Drier ground on Ashtead Common is mainly dominated by bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* but on Epsom Common dry grasslands include patches of remnant heath with ling *Calluna vulgaris*, bell heather *Erica cinerea* and creeping willow *Salix repens*. Scrub is scattered throughout the open grasslands and consists mainly of hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, gorse *Ulex europaeus* and sallow *Salix cinerea*. The grassland and scrub supports breeding birds such as grasshopper warbler and lesser whitethroat and carries large populations of wintering thrushes and finches.

Two main types of woodland are present. Young birch *Betula pendula*–pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* woodland has recently colonised above bracken or tussock grass and has a high scrub content. More mature woodland, particularly on Ashted Common and the southern part of Newton Wood, consists of pedunculate oak, birch, holly *Ilex aquifolium* and coppiced hazel *Corylus avellana*. Of particular importance are several fine old pollards of pedunculate oak which are characteristic of former wood pasture, and of special importance for the rare insects associated with them. The woodland carries a rich community of breeding birds including all three British woodpeckers, woodcock, barn owl and tawny owl.

Stew and Great Ponds are the most valuable of the open water habitats. The open aquatic flora of these two ponds includes duckweeds *Lemna* species, white water-lily *Nymphaea alba* and pondweeds *Potamogeton* species while the marginal fen flora includes great reedmace *Typha latifolia*, bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*, trifid bur-marigold *Bidens tripartita* and narrow-leaved water-plantain *Alisma lanceolatum*. Around the Great Pond a belt of willow is present above tussock sedge *Carex paniculata*, rushes and tussock grass. Breeding birds associated with open water at this site include mallard, moorhen, little grebe and kingfisher.

This site is one of the most important for invertebrates in Surrey. Of particular note are the species of coleoptera (beetles) and diptera (flies) that are associated with dead wood; these include a beetle *Rhizophagus oblongicollis* whose national existence is under threat. Three other dead wood species are regarded as nationally rare: the beetle *Bibloporus minutus* and the flies *Ctenophora bimaculata* and *Oedalea apicalis*. The fly fauna is further enhanced by the presence of two species which have their only Surrey locality here: *Trixia coerulea* and *Servillia lurida*. Two notable butterflies, the purple emperor *Apatura iris* and the purple hairstreak *Quercusia quercus* are also present in the woodland.