

County: Hampshire **Site Name:** Stockbridge Common Marsh SSSI

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

Local Planning Authority: Hampshire County Council, Test Valley Borough Council

National Grid Reference: SU 353340

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 185

1:10,000: SU 33 SE, SW

Area: 67.2 (ha) 166.1 (ac)

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): –

Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 29 August 1991

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Stockbridge Common Marsh is registered and confirmed as common land with common rights of pasturage still exercised. The Common Marsh is owned by the National Trust.

Reasons for Notification:

The site comprises a mosaic of wetland habitats extending for approximately two kilometres along the floodplain of the River Test, including fen, carr, agriculturally unimproved alluvial meadows and an extensive shallow lake. It embraces Stockbridge Common Marsh, an ancient common important for its species-rich and ecologically diverse flora, supporting many exacting plants now rare or local through habitat loss, and also includes stretches of the River Test, a classic, fast-flowing, eutrophic southern chalk stream. The well-developed riparian and wetland communities support breeding and wintering wildfowl as well as a number of rare invertebrate species.

Stockbridge Common Marsh is an area of permanent pasture over which common rights of pasture are exercised. Much of the Common Marsh consists of a species-rich floodplain marsh community with distinctive dwarf sedge *Carex* associations in a matrix of taller vegetation containing abundant tall sedges (including *Carex hostiana*, *C. disticha* and *C. lepidocarpa*), meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, together with a local dominance of tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa* and purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*.

Diversity is increased by a series of old gravel workings, whose well-drained hummocks have developed a dry grassland sward dominated by sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, with such species as harebell *Campanula rotundifolia*, cowslip *Primula veris* and common thyme *Thymus drucei*, the latter abundant on the numerous anthills.

Over 180 species of flowering plants have been recorded on the Common Marsh to date, including a large number of rare and local species, for example, bog pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*, bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*, adder's-tongue fern *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, green-winged orchid *Orchis morio*, southern marsh orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* and marsh valerian *Valeriana dioica*.

To the south of the Common Marsh, the SSSI includes a shallow lake, possibly derived from mediaeval peat cutting. The rate of silt accumulation within the lake is high, and thus the area provides a good example of a hydrosere, exhibiting succession through reed swamp to tall sedge

fen and sallow carr on drier land. The fen is typically dominated by lesser pond and tussock sedges *Carex acutiformis* and *C. paniculata*, but contains an abundance of broad-leaved species including meadow rue *Thalictrum flavum*. Extensive areas of tall reed-dominated vegetation around the lake and to the west of the Common Marsh are important for breeding populations of reed and sedge warblers.

The SSSI includes two main channels of the River Test, whose nutrient-rich, clear water supports a well-developed aquatic flora comprising patches of the water crowfoot *Ranunculus penicillatus* var. *calcareus* and the water starworts *Callitriche* species. These channels, together with Marsh Court Lake support a wide range of characteristic breeding and wintering wetland birds, for example, pochard, tufted duck, mute swan, kingfisher, snipe, redshank and probably Cetti's warbler. The invertebrate interest of this diversity of habitats is high, with a number of rare or local species recorded from a range of groups. Stockbridge Common Marsh, for example, supports the rare weevil *Apion vicinum*, the very local leaf beetle *Chrysolina menthastri*, the marshland beetle *Anthocomus rufus*, and the slender groundhopper *Tetrix subulata*.

Stockbridge Common Marsh represents one of a series of sites selected to conserve the full spectrum of habitats represented in the Test Valley. The overall system is regarded as one of the finest chalk stream systems in Britain.