

COUNTY: CAMBRIDGESHIRE **SITE NAME:** CASTOR FLOOD MEADOWS

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

Local Planning Authorities: Huntingdonshire District Council
Peterborough City Council

National Grid Reference: TL 123973

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 142 **1:10,000:** TL 19 NW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1971 **Date of Last Revision:**

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986 **Date of Last Revision:**

Area: 42.0 ha 103.8 ac

Other information: The boundary of the site has been modified at re-notification by part deletions.

Description and Reasons for Notification

The Castor Flood Meadows are a remnant of the once extensive species-rich alluvial grasslands within the flood plain of the River Nene. A number of different grassland types are present and they represent an example of the kind of vegetation which was once widespread in similar flood plain situations in south, central and eastern England. Much of this type of grassland has since been lost as a result of agricultural improvement and there are now few remaining examples, particularly in Cambridgeshire. The traditional management for hay and grazing allows the floral richness of the meadows to be maintained.

The variety of grassland types present at Castor Flood Meadows is largely influenced by the water content of the soil. In the wettest hollows and adjacent to the River Nene, there are areas of wet alluvial grassland. This grassland community is characterised by the presence of marsh foxtail *Alopecurus geniculatus*, floating sweet-grass *Glyceria fluitans*, common spike-rush *Elocharis palustris* and tubular water-dropwort *Oenanthe fistulosa*. The majority of the site is of the alluvial meadow grassland type. This is characterised by the presence of a range of grasses including creeping bent *Agrostis stolonifera*, meadow foxtail *Alopecurus pratensis*, crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* and meadow fescue *Festuca pratensis* together with herbs such as great burnet *Sanguisorba officinalis*, meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, pepper saxifrage *Silvaum silaus* and common meadow rue *Thalictrum flavum*. Other species of interest which have been recorded include slender tufted-sedge *Carex acuta*, early marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza incarnata* and narrow-leaved water-dropwort *Oenanthe silaifolia*. The latter species is nationally restricted and is apparently declining in frequency. In slightly wetter areas herbs of interest include marsh arrow-grass *Triglochin palustris*, marsh ragwort *Senecio aquaticus* and brown sedge *Carex disticha*.

On the drier soils, there are areas of calcareous loam pasture. This type of grassland is characterised by the presence of grasses such as sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, red fescue *Festuca rubra*, crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata* and yellow oat-grass *Trisetum flavescens* with a variety of herbs such as lady's bedstraw *Galium verum*, salad burnet *Sanguisorba minor*, hoary plantain *Plantago media* and burnet saxifrage *Pimpinella saxifraga*. Of particular interest is the localised occurrence of meadow saxifrage *Saxifraga granulata*.

The River Nene and associated water bodies provide additional areas of value to wildlife generally. There are extensive stands of yellow water-lily *Nuphar lutea* and the local species arrowhead *Sagittaria sagittifolia* is also present. A number of dragonflies have been recorded including the rather local banded agrion *Calopteryx splendens* and red-eyed damselfly *Erythromma najas*. The birds of the area are also of interest and include breeding common snipe and yellow wagtail. In the winter large numbers of duck utilise the flooded meadows.