

SITE NOTIFIED TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE ON 20 OCTOBER 1986

COUNTY: DERBYSHIRE

SITE NAME: HILTON GRAVEL PITS

DISTRICT: SOUTH DERBYSHIRE

SITE REF: 15 WMR

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

Local Planning Authority: DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL, South Derbyshire District Council

National Grid Reference: SK 249315

Area: 32.0 (ha.) 79.1 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 128

1:10,000: SK 23 SW, SK 23 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1981

Date of Last Revision: 1981

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Part owned and managed by Derbyshire Naturalists Trust as a nature reserve. Site boundary modified (extension).

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Hilton Gravel Pits lie on a river terrace in the Trent Valley to the west of Derby. The site has been selected for its range of breeding birds which is supported by a complex of open water, carr, scrub, woodland, marsh and grassland habitats, and as one of the most important sites in the middle region of the Trent valley for over-wintering waterfowl. The site is also of botanical interest for its neutral grassland. Part of the site is nationally important for its palaeolithic remains.

Biology

These gravel pits have been disused for many years and have a well developed range of vegetation from mature willow and alder carr through younger carr and marsh to open water. Areas of drier ground, some of which were not excavated, have become colonised by pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* and birch *Betula pendula* and *Betula pubescens*. A small group of pollarded black poplars *Populus nigra* is also present.

The range of vegetation and the variable depth of the water, coupled with relatively low disturbance, has resulted in an area of great value for breeding birds. These include water birds such as great crested grebe *Podiceps cristatus* and little grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*. The site is particularly important for its warblers with large numbers of sedge warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* and reed warbler *A. scirpaceus*. Small numbers of whitethroat *Sylvia communis* and grasshopper warbler *Locustella naevia* also breed.

In addition to its breeding community, the site is also of interest for its passage and wintering birds. Although there are many disused gravel pits and reservoirs in this part of the Trent valley, Hilton Gravel Pits is one of only two sites set aside as wildfowl refuges. The numbers of wildfowl present vary according to disturbance at other sites in the area. Numbers also increase considerably in hard winters. Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* is the most common species with teal *A. crecca*, pochard *Aythya ferina* and tufted duck *A. fuligula*. There are, on average ten species of water-bird normally using this site in winter.

The grassland, on neutral to acidic soils, is probably typical of what was once common on the Trent valley alluvial terraces. A number of species are present which were formerly much more widespread in the Trent Valley, such as southern marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*, adder's-tongue *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, common twayblade *Listera ovata*, trailing St. John's-wort *Hypericum humifusum* and oval sedge *Carex ovalis*.

Many of the smaller pools have a very rich invertebrate fauna living amongst abundant spiked water-milfoil *Myriophyllum spicatum*.

Geology

This pit represents the type site of the Hilton Terrace deposits of the Quaternary Period in the River Trent basin. This important terrace has been the subject of considerable debate, with opinions still divided as to whether it is of fluvial or fluvio-glacial origin. The terrace has, at this and other sites, provided the most extensive assemblage of palaeolithic remains in the Midlands. Much work remains to be done on the sediments which make up the Hilton Terrace aggradations.