

**COUNTY:** CAMBRIDGESHIRE **SITE NAME:** OUSE WASHES

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

**Local Planning Authorities:** East Cambridgeshire District Council  
Fenland District Council  
West Norfolk District Council

**National Grid Reference:** TL 393747 to TL 571987

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:** 143                      **1:10,000:** TL 37 SE, TL 37 NE, TL 47 NW,  
TL 48 SW, TL 48 SE, TL 48 NE,  
TL 58 NW, TL 59 SW, TL 59 NW,  
TL 59 NE

**Date Notified (Under 1949 Act):** 1955                      **Date of Last Revision:** 1971

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

**Area:** 2,403 ha 5,937 ac

**Other information:** The Ouse Washes lie between The Hundred Foot/New Bedford River to the south-east and the Old Bedford River/Counter Drain to the north-west. These rivers fall within the boundary of the Site of Special Scientific Interest. The Old Bedford River in particular is of national nature conservation importance in its own right.

The Ouse Washes play a major land drainage role as a flood water storage area and the washland is thus subject to regular winter flooding. In the summer months the area provides grazing and hay.

The regular winter flooding and the continuance of traditional management of cattle grazing and hay cutting maintains the nature conservation value of the area. The majority of the site is under nature reserve management by the Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire Naturalists' Trust, the Cambridgeshire and Isle of Ely Naturalists' Trust, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Wildfowl Trust.

The Ouse Washes are listed under the Government ratified RAMSAR Convention of 1972 in view of their international importance as wetland habitat. This is a Nature Conservation Review Grade I \* site.

A boundary modification has been made at this revision to exclude an area of arable.

### **Description and Reasons for Notification**

The site is one of the country's few remaining areas of extensive washland habitat. It is of particular note for the large numbers of wildfowl and waders which it supports, for the large area of unimproved neutral grassland communities which it holds and for the richness of the aquatic fauna and flora within the associated watercourse. The capacity of the site to hold wintering and breeding waterfowl and waders is of international significance. Of particular note in the winter are the large numbers of teal *Anas crecca*, pintail *Anas acuta*, wigeon *Anas penelope*, shoveler *Anas clypeata*, pochard *Aythya ferina* and Bewick's swan *Cygnus bewickii*.

The grassland communities of the area are characterised by such grasses as reed and floating sweet-grass *Glyceria maxima* and *G. fluitans*, reed canary-grass *Phalaris arundinacea*, marsh foxtail *Alopecurus geniculatus* together with a variety of sedges and rushes. Typical herbs include amphibious bistort *Polygonum amphibium*, water-pepper *Polygonum hydropiper* and tubular water-dropwort *Oenanthe fistulosa*.

The associated dykes and rivers hold a great variety of aquatic plants, the pondweeds *Potamogeton* spp. are particularly well represented. Other aquatic species include the fringed water-lily *Nymphoides peltata*, greater water-parsnip *Sium latifolium* and the four species of duckweeds *Lemna* spp.

The limnological interest of the Ouse Washes is further diversified by the Old Bedford River and River Delph, both good examples of base-rich, sluggish, lowland rivers. The flora includes the fan-leaved water-crow foot *Ranunculus circinatus*, yellow water-lily *Nuphar lutea*, arrowhead *Sagittaria sagittifolia*, long-stalked pondweed *Potamogeton praelongus*, perfoliate pondweed *Potamogeton perfoliatus*, and river water-dropwort *Oenanthe fluviatilis*. The associated aquatic and semi-aquatic fauna is similarly diverse.