

COUNTY: Norfolk

SITE NAME: CAWSTON AND MARSHAM HEATHS

DISTRICT: Broadland

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

Local Planning Authority: Broadland District Council

National Grid Reference: TG 170235 Area: 125.7 (ha) 310.6 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 133 1:10,000: TG 12 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): – Date of Last Revision: –

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

Other Information:
A new site.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Cawston and Marsham Heaths form the largest area of Heather-dominated heathland now remaining in east Norfolk. They represent a locally scarce type which shows affinities to the Atlantic coastal heaths found in western Britain. Dry Heather-heathland has developed on glacial sands and gravels and the site has been subject to generations of grazing and burning. As a result there is a diverse flora which includes a rich assemblage of lichens. The site is also of considerable ornithological interest.

Although contiguous, the vegetation on the two heaths illustrates interesting variations due to differences in past management practices. Cawston Heath is dominated by Heather *Calluna vulgaris* and Bell Heather *Erica cinerea* and the uneven age structure provides suitable conditions for many low-growing lichens including *Cladonia gonechi* at its only East Anglian locality. On Marsham Heath, Western Gorse *Ulex gallii*, a local species more usually associated with Atlantic coastal heaths, is co-dominant with Heather. Cross-leaved Heath *Erica tetralix* is abundant in damp hollows where Soft Rush *Juncus effusus* and Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* are also frequent. Other heathland plants of interest include Petty Whin *Genista anglica*, Wavy Hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa* and Heath Bedstraw *Galium saxatile*. A number of paths cross the open heath and these support a characteristic acid grassland flora with Early Hair-grass *Aira praecox*, Green-ribbed Sedge *Carex binervis*, Tormentil *Potentilla erecta* and Field Woodrush *Luzula campestris*.

Wet heath habitats are not well-developed but there is a small permanent pool on Cawston Heath with some surrounding marshy vegetation which includes Pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, Soft Rush and bog mosses *Sphagnum* spp.

Gorse *Ulex europaeus* is scattered over much of the heath with occasional saplings of Silver Birch *Betula pendula* and Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur*. These two species form a closed canopy of young secondary woodland in places. Quaker's Wood is an old plantation of coppiced Sweet Chestnut *Castanea sativa* with some Birch and Rowan *Sorbus aucuparia*. The ground flora is dominated by Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and Creeping Soft-grass *Holcus mollis* with Wood Sage *Teucrium scorodonia* and Honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum*. Self-sown stands of Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris* with Birch have developed near mature conifer plantations.

A wide variety of heathland birds nest on the site including Tree Pipits, Whinchats and occasional Nightjars and the site is important as a winter roost for Hen Harriers.