

COUNTY: HEREFORD AND WORCESTER

SITE NAME: LITTLEMARSH
COMMON

DISTRICT: SOUTH HEREFORD

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

Local Planning Authority: HEREFORD AND WORCESTER COUNTY COUNCIL, South Hereford District Council

National Grid Reference: SO 439378

Area: 1.942 (ha.) 4.8 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 149

1:10,000: SO 43 NW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1969

Date of Last Revision: 1975

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1984

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

The Common is managed as a nature reserve by the Hereford & Radnor Trust.

Reasons for Notification:

Littlemarsh Common is an area of wet grassland in the parish of Eaton Bishop, three miles west of the City of Hereford.

Due to agricultural intensification and drainage, such areas have become much rarer in recent years.

The grassland of the Common is dominated by tall grasses such as cocksfoot *Dactylis glomerata*, false oat grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*, tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia caespitosa* and red fescue *Festuca rubra*. In the wetter parts of the grassland soft rush *Juncus effusus* and great hairy willow-herb *Epilobium hirsutum* are abundant.

The grassland contains a rich variety of other plants, a number of which are now of local distribution in Herefordshire. These include spiny rest-harrow *Ononis spinosa*, common spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, lady's mantle *Alchemilla vestita* and devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*.

Semi-aquatic plant communities occur in the wet ditches and hollows of the Common. These include such characteristic plants as yellow flag *Iris pseudacorus*, meadow sweet *Filipendula ulmaria* and water figwort *Scrophularia auriculata*.

In recent years the undergrazing of the Common has allowed some scrub colonisation to take place, with willow *Salix caprea* and *S. alba*, hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* being dominant. Other interesting species include spindle *Euonymus europaeus* and guelder rose *Viburnum opulus*.

This mixture of grassland, semi-aquatic areas and scrub provides an important habitat for a good variety of birds, including Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*.