

**COUNTY:** BEDFORDSHIRE                      **SITE NAME:** SOUTHILL LAKE AND WOODS

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

**Local Planning Authorities:** Mid Bedfordshire District Council  
Bedfordshire County Council

**National Grid Reference:** TL 141428

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:** 153                      **1:10,000:** TL 14 SW

**Date Notified (Under 1949 Act):** 1970                      **Date of Last Revision:**

**Date Notified (Under 1981 Act):** 1985                      **Date of Last Revision:**

**Area:** 25.28 ha 62.47 ac

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

Southill Woods is an example of a wet valley alderwood which has developed where springs and flushes arise at the junction of the Lower Greensand with the Gault Clay of mid-Bedfordshire. The woodland grades westward into open, tall fen vegetation.

A small stream bisects the wood, and where it meets Southill lake there is an area of old reed bed. The lake is important for its small island which is occupied by the larger of only two heronries in the county.

Valley alderwood is uncommon both in the county and throughout eastern England. Drainage has generally reduced the extent of wetland habitats nationally.

The woodland is dominated by alder *Alnus glutinosa* which has been managed in the past as a coppice together with ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and willow *Salix* spp. The drier margins have pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* and hazel *Corylus avellana* over a carpet of dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*.

In the wetter areas the ground flora is dominated by lesser pond sedge *Carex acutiformis*, greater tussock sedge *C. paniculata*, pendulous sedge *C. pendula* and common reed *Phragmites australis*. Other species include yellow iris *Iris pseudacorus*, meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria* and hemp-agrimony *Eupatorium cannabinum*.

The tall fen has a similar species composition but is more luxuriant and includes additional species such as angelica *Angelica sylvestris* and great willow herb *Epilobium hirsutum*.

Additional interest is provided by a narrow strip of wood dominated by old, coppiced sweet chestnut *Castanea sativa* with occasional birch *Betula* spp., pedunculate oak, ash and hazel over a ground flora locally dominated by bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and creeping soft-grass *Holcus mollis*, and the lake which supports a characteristic breeding bird population.

Re-presentation of details approved by Council. Re-typed December 1998.

Site Area calculated by GIS 19 April 1998.