

**County:** Hampshire **Site Name:** Southampton Common SSSI

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

**Local Planning Authority:** Hampshire County Council, Southampton City Council

**National Grid Reference:** SU 415145

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:** 196                      **1:25,000:** SU 41, SU 51

**Area:** 89.8 (ha) 221.89 (ac)

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

**Date Notified (Under 1981 Act):** 24.2.1987                      **Date of Last Revision:** –

**Other Information:**

Owned by Southampton City Council. Registered and confirmed as common land, but with no common rights.

**Reasons for Notification:**

The Site of Special Scientific Interest embraces a large part of Southampton Common which despite its urban context still includes a range of interesting and relatively undisturbed habitats. Its outstanding importance, however, lies in the very large populations of amphibia which mainly inhabit the Boating Lake during the spring and summer and disperse widely over the remainder of the SSSI during the remainder of the year. The boundary has thus been drawn to include both the known hibernating and breeding areas. The main breeding water supports the three native species of newts, palmate newts *Triturus helveticus*, smooth newts *T. vulgaris* and great crested newts *T. cristatus*, together with common frogs *Rana temporaria* and common toads *Bufo bufo*, in considerable numbers. A second lake, known as the Ornamental Lake, also supports large populations of at least four of the five species. The great crested newt is nationally rare and the population on Southampton Common is one of the largest known in Britain. The newts appear to be heavily reliant on systems of ditches in and around the Common during migrations to hibernating sites and large numbers are known to over-winter in the ditches themselves.

The Common formerly afforded grazing for the burghers of Southampton and much of it was open wood-pasture. Though many ornamental trees have been planted since the mid-19th century, much of the original ancient oak woodland remains, with abundant birch and holly mainly of comparatively recent origin. The larger oaks have a breast height girth in excess of 3.5 metres. Younger generations of oaks, together with prolific holly regeneration, have arisen since the cessation of grazing early this century. The ground flora is relatively impoverished, in common with most wood-pasture derivatives, but, notably, includes small numbers of broad-leaved helleborine *Epipactis helleborine* which occur throughout the woods. Intervening glades and clearings vary widely in their vegetation. Many comprise improved and reseeded closely mown grassland swards of little interest except for large populations of autumn ladies tresses *Spiranthes spiralis*. Locally, however, there are areas of relict dry *Calluna* heath on the higher, free-draining soils, and wet purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*/dwarf gorse *Ulex minor*/cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix* associations with *Sphagnum* mosses, where drainage is impeded.

Low lying areas support herb-rich neutral marshy vegetation dominated by rushes *Juncus* species, field horsetail *Equisetum arvense* and various grasses including red and meadow fescues *Festuca rubra* and *F. pratensis*, sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*. Approximately 90 species have been recorded of which 13 are plants indicative of long established, agriculturally unimproved grassland, for example, adder's-tongue fern *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, bog pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*, southern marsh orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* and sneezewort *Achillea ptarmica*. Green-winged orchids *Orchis morio* occur in large numbers on one site. In addition to their botanical interest, these meadows, with their network of ditches, are also important for providing terrestrial habitat for the amphibia. The assemblage of meadow habitats, especially those at the wetter end of the spectrum, are among the best examples of species-rich mown pasture in the Hampshire Basin.