

**County:** Lancashire **Site Name:** Leighton Moss

**District:** Lancaster

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

**Local Planning Authority:** Lancaster City Council

**National Grid Reference:** SD 483749 **Area:** 124.9 (ha) 309.0 (ac)

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50 000** 97 **1:10 000** SD 47 NE, SD 47 SE

**Date Notified (Under 1949 Act):** 1951 **Date of Last Revision:** 1979

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

#### **Other Information:**

1. Originally notified in 1951 as Storr's Moss.
2. Boundary revised by partial deletion at re-notification.
3. The site is listed in 'A Nature Conservation Review', edited by D. A. Ratcliffe (1977), Cambridge University Press.
4. Much of the site is an RSPB reserve.
5. The site is situated in the Arnside-Silverdale AONB.
6. Otters and red squirrels, protected species listed in Schedule 5 of the above Act, are resident.

#### **Reasons for Notification:**

Leighton Moss, situated between Warton Crag and Silverdale on the edge of Morecambe Bay, is a site of outstanding ornithological importance. It contains the largest reedbed in north-west England and the only large reedbed in Lancashire; the only other example of any significant size being the nearby Hawes Water Moss.

The site was originally an extensive peat moss which was drained and brought into agricultural use as arable land in the 19th century. In 1917, following cessation of pumped drainage, the valley flooded with base-rich water from the surrounding limestone hills and soon developed into a Phragmites reedbed. In 1964 Leighton Moss became an RSPB reserve, and has since been managed to maintain and diversify the habitats of wetland birds. There are extensive areas of open water in the reedbeds,

and areas of willow scrub and mixed fen vegetation. A typical and varied fen flora has developed in some parts and this shows all stages of transition from open water to woodland.

The reedbeds are important as a northern outpost of broadland-type avifauna, with nationally important breeding populations of bittern (about 12 pairs, i.e. about 25% of the current British population), and bearded tit (about 30 pairs), but the diversity of habitat supports a wide range of birds with over 65 species breeding regularly. These include important populations of pochard (about 8 pairs) and shoveler (about 15 pairs), a large population of reed warbler (one of the most northerly colonies in Britain), sedge and grasshopper warblers, water rail, spotted crake and a wide range of waterfowl. The site also supports a variety of passage and wintering waterfowl and other birds, including nationally important numbers of teal (up to 1,800), shoveler (up to 220) and gadwall (up to 35).

The site is also of value for other fauna. It is one of the few places in Lancashire where otters regularly breed. Red squirrels, roe and red deer occur, and a wide range of butterflies have been recorded from the site.