

COUNTY: Norfolk

SITE NAME: EAST RUSTON COMMON

DISTRICT: North Norfolk

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

Local Planning Authority: North Norfolk District Council

National Grid Reference: TG 340280 Area: 38.3 (ha) 94.6 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 133 1:10,000: TG 32 NW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1959 Date of Last Revision: -

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

Other Information:

Description and Reasons for Notification:

East Ruston Common is a large area of unimproved heathland and fen situated in the valley of a tributary of the River Ant. Acidic flushes emerging from sands and gravels at the base of surrounding high ground, are a notable feature of the site and an unusual plant community has developed in these conditions, providing a contrast with the majority of the spring-fed fens which are calcareous. There is a very clear zonation of vegetation types from acidic grassland through acidic flush and fen to carr woodland on the lowest-lying ground. Two rare species of spider have been recorded on the site.

Dry acidic grassland and heath occupies the sands and gravels on high ground. The grass sward is dominated by Brown Bent-grass *Agrostis canina*, Common Bent-grass *A. capillaris* and Wavy Hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa* with frequent Tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, Common Milkwort *Polygala vulgaris*, Sheep's Sorrel *Rumex acetosella* and Heath Bedstraw *Galium saxatile*. Heather *Calluna vulgaris* is present in places. Much of the grassland is invaded by Gorse *Ulex europaeus* and young trees of Birch (both *Betula pendula* and *B. pubescens*) and dense scrub now covers the majority of the dry ground.

Damp acidic heathland occurs locally between the dry land and the fen. Heather is frequent with abundant Marsh Pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, Tormentil and Narrow Buckler-fern *Dryopteris carthusiana*. Elsewhere the base of the slope is marked by acidic flushes. Bog mosses *Sphagnum* spp. form a carpet in places but the vegetation is generally dominated by Soft Rush *Juncus effusus* and White Sedge *Carex curta*. Several notable plants are present in this zone including Cotton-grass *Eriophorum angustifolium*, Marsh Cinquefoil *Potentilla palustris*, Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*, Jointed Rush *Juncus articulatus* and Bottle Sedge *Carex rostrata*.

The flushes grade into areas of mixed fen vegetation on low-lying ground. The fen is at first acidic near the slope but soon becomes base-rich towards the Hundred Stream. Marsh Cinquefoil and Soft Rush are abundant on the acidic fen but the remaining areas are dominated by Reed *Phragmites australis* with Saw Sedge *Cladium mariscus* co-dominant in places. Typical fenland plants include Purple Smallreed *Calamagrostis canescens*, Branched Bur-reed *Sparganium erectum*, Water Dock *Rumex hydrolapathum*, Greater Bird's-foot Trefoil *Lotus uliginosus* and the uncommon Milk Parsley *Peucedanum palustre*.

Carr woodland has developed along the stream. Alder *Alnus glutinosa* is dominant with abundant Common Sallow *Salix cinerea* and the ground flora includes Yellow Flag *Iris pseudacorus*, Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria* and Royal Fern *Osmunda regalis*.

The rare spider *Acanthophyma gowerensis* has been recorded and the site is the only known English locality for the species. Another nationally rare spider, *Hygrolycosa rubrofasciata*, is also present.