

**COUNTY:** Lancashire

**SITE NAME:** Cockerham Marsh

**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 446516      **Area:** 10 ha. 24.71 ac

**Ordnance Survey Sheet: 1:50,000: 102    1:10,000: SD 45 SW**

**Date Notified (Under 1949 Act):** 1949

**Date of Last Revision:** -

**Date Notified (Under 1981 Act):** 1985

**Date of Last Revision:** 1985

**Other Information:** 1. This site is adjacent to the Lune Estuary SSSI of which it was formerly a part.

2. Natterjack toads, a protected species listed in Schedule 5 of the 1981 Act, are resident.

**Reasons for Notification:**

The site is located on the west side of the Cocker Channel on Cockerham March which was tidal saltmarsh until enclosed by the Pilling-Cockerham sea defence embankment in 1981. It contains the only colony of the natterjack toad (*Bufo calamita*) in Lancashire. The site consists of the pools and marshy grassland currently used by the toads and the adjacent length of embankment and delph ditch into which the colony may expand.

The natterjack toads were first discovered at Cockerham by naturalists in 1969, though it was clear that the colony had been in existence for a long time before this. They were found to be breeding in small pools and foraging on the surrounding grazed saltmarsh which was dominated by dense stands of sea rush (*Juncus maritimus*) with occasional clumps of gorse. This part of the saltmarsh was enclosed by the remains of a very old embankment, and being elevated above the general level of the marsh was only washed over by the highest tides. The natterjacks had erratic breeding success. In some years exceptional tides made the pools too saline, and often the pools dried out before the tadpoles could complete metamorphosis. The population was estimated at about a hundred individuals.

After the sea defence bank was constructed in 1981 the area ceased to be tidal but the vegetation in the area used by the natterjacks has not changed, although the adjoining land has been intensively improved agriculturally, and the toads have had several successful breeding years. Up to the date of re-notification the water in the delph ditch had been too salty to be used by the natterjacks but it is hoped that as the salinity declines the colony will expand along the delph ditch and embankment.

The natterjack toad is a rare and endangered species nationally and is given special protection by the Wildlife and Countryside Act. This colony is of particular interest being the only one

in Lancashire and as it is so isolated from other populations, the nearest known colonies being in the Southport dunes to the south and on Walney Island to the north. It is remarkable that this small population has survived in isolation in such a restricted breeding situation.