

File ref: SD 59/3

County: Cumbria **Site Name:** Skelsmergh Tarn

District: South Lakeland

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

Local Planning Authority: South Lakeland District Council

National Grid Reference: SD 533967 **Area:** 3.3 (ha) 8.2 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 97 **1:10,000:** SD 59 NW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1954 **Date of Last Revision:** 1966

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

Other Information:

1. The boundary of the site has been modified at renotification by partial deletion.

Reasons for Notification:

Skelsmergh Tarn lies in a small steep-sided valley approximately two miles north east of Kendal, and just to the east of the A6. The site comprises willow carr, fen-wet grassland and the Tarn itself. This is a marl tarn, so called because of the high concentration of calcium carbonate in the water. Marl tarns are rare habitats in Britain and are unusual in South Cumbria, with few other examples apart from Cunswick Tarn west of Kendal and Urswick Tarn south of Ulverston. Skelsmergh Tarn contrasts with these two sites in that its adjacent fen vegetation is typical of more acid conditions and it has a different range of invertebrates.

The Tarn occupies a deep basin formed in glacial drift material and is surrounded by an emergent zone of common club-rush *Scirpus lacustris* within which is a continuous ring of floating yellow and white water lilies *Nuphar lutea* and *Nymphaea alba* and some bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*. The aquatic invertebrate fauna is influenced by the calcareous conditions as shown by the abundance of water snails (especially *Planorbis* species) and includes *Bithynia tentaculata*, a species not found in the more acid tarns of the Lake District.

Conditions are different around the northern side of the Tarn where a small upwelling stream flows slowly through a zone dominated by tufted sedge *Carex elata* and purple moor grass *Molinia caerulea* with water horsetail *Equisetum fluviatile* and bog moss *Sphagnum*. This area supports several aquatic invertebrate species which are more characteristic of flowing water. These include two species of net-spinning caddis flies *Plectrocnemia* spp. and stoneflies *Nemurella* spp. which breed in abundance here.

Around the southern edges of the Tarn is an area of willow carr dominated by grey sallows *Salix cinerea* with some bay willow *S. pentandra*, hairy birch *Betula pubescens* and bird cherry *Prunus padus*. This is similar to Otterbank Carr at the northern end of the site, where there is also some alder *Alnus glutinosa*. Both areas have a ground flora with abundant lesser pond-sedge *Carex acutiformis* and other species such as meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, marsh-

marigold *Caltha palustris*, yellow loosestrife *Lysimachia vulgaris* and ferns, for example, lady-fern *Athyrium filix-femina*.

Water from Otterbank Carr drains down to the Tarn through an area of wet grassland which has a diverse flora. Rushes (*Juncus* species) and sedges (*Carex* species) are abundant, together with a wide variety of other plants. These include grass-of-Parnassus *Parnassia palustris*, marsh arrowgrass *Triglochin palustris*, marsh valerian *Valeriana dioica* and ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*.