

COUNTY: Norfolk

SITE NAME: HALVERGATE MARSHES

DISTRICT: Broadland

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

Local Planning Authority: Broads Authority

National Grid Reference: TG 450050

Area: 1430.13 (ha) 3535.4 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 134

1:10,000: TG40

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1981

Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1982

Date of Last Revision: 1995

Other Information:

This site includes land which forms part of the Broadland SPA/Ramsar and pSAC. The RSPB Berney Marshes reserve is found within this site.

Reasons for Notification:

Halvergate Marshes form the largest expanse of traditionally managed grazing/grass marshes with their intersecting system of drainage ditches, in Broadland. The soils are peaty along the upland margin and grade into clay alluvial soils nearer the Breydon estuary. A well-developed band of woodland occurs along the upland marsh margin and small areas of unimproved pasture, wet fen meadow, reedbed and alder carr add to the diversity of the habitat.

The ditches are of outstanding importance for nature conservation and show a transition from fresh to brackish conditions. They support the wide range of aquatic ditch community types for which Broadland is notable. These include acid and base-rich mesotrophic communities, meso-eutrophic communities, freshwater eutrophic types and truly brackish communities. The wide range of water conditions support an outstanding assemblage of plants and a rich invertebrate fauna. The freshwater ditches rich in pondweeds are recognised in the Broadland context as being of international importance.

The freshwater ditch communities occur along the upland marsh margin in association with a flow of relatively nutrient-poor spring water. Many of the ditches along the peaty margin contain a community typified by broad-leaved pondweed *Potamogeton natans*, water violet *Hottonia palustris* and the nationally scarce whorled water milfoil *Myriophyllum verticillatum*. Away from the margins, on the clay soils, the ditches tend to be dominated by the nationally scarce water soldier *Stratiotes aloides*. The freshwater ditches also support the nationally scarce, fen pondweed *Potamogeton coloratus*, hairlike pondweed *Potamogeton trichoides* and water parsnip *Sium latifolium* and the regionally important lesser water plantain *Baldellia ranunculoides*, river water dropwort *Oenanthe fluviatilis*, flat-stalked pondweed *Potamogeton friesii*, blunt-leaved pondweed *Potamogeton obtusifolius*, greater spearwort *Ranunculus lingua*, the floating club-rush *Scirpus fluitans* and the least bur-reed *Sparganium natans*.

The area close to the Breydon estuary possesses the best brackish ditch communities anywhere in Broadland. These support the regionally important soft hornwort *Ceratophyllum submersum* and brackish water crowfoot *Ranunculus baudotii*. The brackish ditch edges support the nationally scarce stiff saltmarsh grass *Puccinellia rupestris* and the regionally important marsh dock *Rumex palustris*.

The sea walls support the nationally scarce sea barley *Hordeum marinum* and marsh sow thistle *Sonchus palustris*, while marsh mallow *Althaea officinalis* and the divided sedge *Carex divisa* occur on grazing marshes and ungrazed tracks along the Breydon estuary.

The ditch systems are of outstanding invertebrate interest. The range of habitat from acidic to base rich and fresh to brackish adds extra diversity to the species and communities present. In addition to the many notable species present, many are rare in a national context. The nationally rare species include the Norfolk hawk dragonfly *Aeshna isosceles* now found widely distributed throughout the ditch system, the great silver water-beetle *Hydrophilus piceus* and a large hoverfly of brackish dykes, *Lejops vittata*.

Halvergate Marshes support internationally important numbers of wintering Bewick's swan and nationally important populations of breeding and wintering ruff, gadwall and shoveler and wintering bean goose, European white-fronted goose and wigeon. Other species breeding on the Halvergate Marshes include pochard, redshank, snipe, oystercatcher, yellow wagtail, ringed plover, mute swan, shelduck, bearded tit and grey partridge. Wintering species include golden plover, lapwing, teal, pochard, short-eared owl, snipe, dunlin, brent goose, mute swan, pintail, shelduck and barn owl.