COUNTY: BERKSHIRE **SITE NAME:** EASTON FARM MEADOW

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

Local Planning Authorities: Newbury District Council, Berkshire County

National Grid Reference: SU418722

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 175 **1:10,000:** SU47 SW

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985 **Date of Last Revision:**

Area: 1.6 ha 3.9 ac

Description and Reasons for Notification

A small meadow with unimproved, herb-rich neutral grassland, a habitat now rare and rapidly declining in Berkshire.

Easton Farm Meadow is situated beside the River Lambourn and is bounded by water except on its northern side. The site overlies alluvium and the soils consist of calcareous alluvial gleys. In the past the meadows around Easton Farm, many of which are unimproved, were no doubt managed traditionally as 'floated' water meadows. An old carrier stream bisects Easton Farm Meadow.

The meadow is an example of the *Cynosurus cristatus-Caltha palustris* flood pasture and water-meadow plant community. A very high proportion of characteristic plants are present, including abundant marsh-marigold *Caltha palustris*, common spike-rush *Eleocharis palustris*, meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, wild angelica *Angelica sylvestris*, marsh thistle *Cirsium palustre*, fen bedstraw *Galium uliginosum*, ragged-robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi* and Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*, and frequent marsh valerian *Valeriana dioica*, carnation sedge *Carex panicea* and common sedge *C. nigra*. The south-east end of the meadow grades into species-rich swamp with the addition of yellow iris *Iris pseudacorus*, water dock *Rumex hydrolapathum*, lesser pond-sedge *Carex acutiformis* and greater tussock-sedge *C. paniculata*. Southern marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* and early marsh-orchid *D. incarnata* are frequent.

A total of 15 grasses, 5 sedges and 54 grassland herbs have been recorded, of which several are species indicative of ancient meadows with a long history of freedom from improvement and disturbance, for example the uncommon flat-sedge *Blysmus compressus*.

The meadow is not neglected, the drier part being mown for hay and the whole area subsequently being grazed. Snipe breed in the meadow and the diverse insect fauna includes several species which are rare in Berkshire such as the beetle *Silis ruficollis*, the bug *Zicrona caerulea*, the ladybird *Subcoccinella 24-punctata* and the local stratiomyid fly *Nemotelus pantherinus*. Generally, because of the destructive effect of hay cutting, the range of insect species found in hay meadows is limited in comparison with grazed pasture. At this site the fact that part is too wet to be mown has helped to maintain a rich insect fauna.