

County: Kent

Site name: Seabrook Stream

District: Shepway

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

Local Planning Authority: Shepway District Council

National Grid Reference: TR 178367

Area: 23.8 ha 58.8 acres

Ordnance Survey Sheet: 1:50,000:189

1:10,000: TR 13 NE

Date notified (Under 1949 Act): -

Date of last revision: -

Date notified (under 1981 Act): 1987

Date of last revision: -

Other information:

This is a new site.

Description

The interest of this site centres on the alder carr and fen communities that support an exceptional number of crane-fly species. The varied geology over the course of the stream has given rise to a range of conditions in which different habitats have developed in close proximity.

Rising in a wooded valley below the Chalk of the North Downs near Folkestone, the Seabrook Stream crosses a belt of Gault Clay before cutting into the Lower Greensand. A springline occurs at the junction between the Folkestone and Sandgate Beds of the Lower Greensand series, resulting in numerous seepages on both sides of the valley and a gradation from dry sandy conditions, towards the top of the valley sides, to saturated peat and tributary streams on the valley floor.

Base-rich springline alder carr has developed on the wettest soils and here the ground flora is varied. Characteristic species such as opposite-leaved golden saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*, lesser pond-sedge *Carex acutiformis* and common valerian *Valeriana officinalis* are frequent in some areas along with marsh marigold *Caltha palustris* and yellow flag *Iris pseudacorus*. In the west of the site where a tributary stream arises there are more willows *Salix* spp and the ground flora is dominated by sedges *Carex* spp and wood club-rush *Scirpus sylvaticus*. Where seepages arise above the woodland rich flush communities occur, generally dominated by great horsetail *Equisetum telmateia* and great willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum* but also including greater pond-sedge *Carex riparia*, marsh horsetail *Equisetum palustre* and common spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsia*. There are several areas of reedswamp dominated by common reed *Phragmites australis* within the site, the largest extending to almost two hectares.

On the drier slopes of the valley there is woodland, scrub and neutral grassland. The woodland canopy is dominated by oak *Quercus robur*, ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and hazel *Corylus avellana* with bluebells *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, red campion *Silene dioica* and moschatel *Adoxa moschatellina* frequent amongst the ground flora. The scrub is principally of hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, elder *Sambucus niger* and blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*. Within the grassland are found species characteristic of basic soils, such as stemless thistle *Cirsium acaule* as well as other species characteristic of more acid soils, such as heath speedwell *Veronica officinalis*.

The whole of the Seabrook valley supports an exceptional number of crane-fly species, 67 having been recorded to date from this site alone. This total includes four nationally scarce species, one being

Erioptera limbata, which lives on stream margins, known from only two other sites in Britain. It is the seepages within the alder carr providing a wide range of moisture regimes, that allow this site to support so many species. 14 other invertebrate species found on the site are nationally scarce: for example the caddis fly *Rhyacophila septentrionis* which lives in the stream itself and whose larvae feed on those of midges, mayflies and stoneflies; *Osmylus fulvicephalus*, Britain's largest lacewing, found by wooded streams and whose larvae feed on insects at the water margin; and the harvestman *Homalenotus quadridentatus* which occurs in the drier grassland further up the valley sides.

Breeding bird species present are known to include reed and sedges warblers, grey wagtail and sand martin. On a national scale sand martins have undergone major population changes in recent years and the quarry in the west of the site contains one of the few significant colonies known in Kent.