

Site name: Thatcham Reed Beds SSSI **County:** Berkshire

District: West Berkshire Council

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

Local Planning Authority: West Berkshire Council

National Grid reference: SU507665

Area: 66.9 (ha) 165.3 (ac)

Ordnance Survey sheet: 1:50,000: 174 **1:10,000:** SU56NW, SU46NE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1974

Date notified (under 1981 Act): 1983

Date of last revision: 10 October 2002

Reasons for notification:

Thatcham Reed Beds is important nationally for its extensive reedbed, species rich alder woodland and fen habitats. The latter supports Desmoulin's whorl snail, which is of national and European importance. A large assemblage of breeding birds including nationally rare species such as Cetti's warbler is also associated with the reedbed, fen and open water habitats found at Thatcham Reed Beds.

The relevant National Vegetation Classification communities are: *Phragmites australis* swamp (NVC S4), *Phragmites australis* - *Eupatorium cannabinum* fen (NVC S25), *Carex riparia* swamp (NVC S6), *Carex acutiformis* swamp (NVC S7), *Phragmites australis* - *Urtica dioica* fen (NVC S26), and *Alnus glutinosa* woodland (NVC W5).

General description:

Thatcham Reed Beds supports large populations of the nationally rare and declining Desmoulin's whorl snail *Vertigo moulinsiana*. This species is listed in the British Red Data Book and is scheduled on Annex II of the European Habitats Directive. It is confined to calcareous river valleys, fens and lake margins. It is rare throughout Europe and the British Isles support a large proportion of the European population. Thatcham Reed Beds is a nationally important site for this species.

There is an extensive area (12.7 hectares) of reed *Phragmites australis* beds on waterlogged peaty soils, a UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitat, which forms one of the largest inland reed bed complexes in southern England, equivalent to 3.3% of the total area of reedbed in the southern counties. There are no reed beds of comparable size in the Kennet valley or elsewhere in Berkshire, the largest being Woolhampton Reedbed (4 hectares).

The site has extensive areas of Desmoulin's whorl snail's favoured habitat, which is dominated by lesser pond sedge *Carex acutiformis*, and reed sweet-grass *Glyceria maxima*. The vegetation also includes a range of tall wetland plants such as common valerian *Valeriana officinalis*, hemlock water dropwort *Oenanthe crocata*, skullcap *Scutellaria galericulata*, marsh woundwort *Stachys palustris*, water mint *Mentha aquatica* and marsh bedstraw *Galium palustre*. Of particular note is the occurrence of common meadow-rue *Thalictrum flavum*, which is scarce in Berkshire.

Alder *Alnus glutinosa* woodland is also well represented on the site. Such floodplain woodland is rare throughout Europe and is a priority for conservation purposes.

The reed beds, sedge-dominated fen and open water areas are of special interest for birds as they support large breeding populations of reed warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*, sedge warbler *A. schoenobaenus* and Cetti's warbler *Cettia cetti*. The water rail *Rallus aquaticus* is also a regular breeding species. The reeds provide a valuable refuge for migrants in spring and autumn and are also an important winter habitat for many species including large populations of wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* and uncommon visitors such as bearded tit *Panurus biarmicus* and bittern *Botaurus stellaris*.

The site also includes willow *Salix* scrub, an area of open water resulting from gravel extraction, and a short section of the Kennet and Avon Canal.

The site is of county importance for its entomological interest, with several notable species of moths including the scarce burnished brass *Diachrysia chryson*, butterbur *Hydraecia petastitus*, dentated pug *anticollis sparsata* and obscure wainscot *Mythimna straminea*. A number of rare flies, Diptera, also occur including the crane fly *Limonia ornata* and the hoverfly *Stratiomys potamida*.

Other information:

The SSSI forms part of Kennet and Lambourn Floodplain candidate Special Area of Conservation designated for important populations of Desmoulin's whorl snail. The site lies within the London Basin Natural Area.