

County: Devon

Site Name: South Milton Ley

District: South Hams

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

Local Planning Authority: Devon County Council
South Hams District Council

National Grid Reference: SX 685422 **Area:** 16.2 (ha) 40.0 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 202 **1:10,000:** SX 64 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1976 **Date of Last Revision:** –

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

Other Information:

A part of the site is managed as a nature reserve by the Devon Bird Watching Preservation Society.

Description:

South Milton Ley is one of the best examples of freshwater reedbed in Devon and is of particular importance for its breeding bird community and for the variety of birds using the site on passage.

The Ley lies in a shallow coastal river valley separated from the sea by a sand bar. Adjacent to this bar, the waters of the Ley are slightly brackish being subject to occasional tidal influence, but upstream they give way to a freshwater reedswamp having only limited areas of open water. The reedswamp of the lower Ley is dominated by common reed *Phragmites australis*, while further upstream the vegetation contains a mixture of other tall fen species including hemlock water-dropwort *Oenanthe crocata*, yellow flag *Iris pseudacorus*, great willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum*, and reed sweet-grass *Glyceria maxima*. Dense stands of willow *Salix* sp. also occur in the middle areas of these upper regions.

South Milton Ley supports a diverse community of breeding birds characteristic of freshwater reedbed including reed warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*, sedge warbler *A. schoenobaenus* and Cetti's warbler *Cettia cetti*, a species afforded special protection by its inclusion in Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981. Also listed in Schedule 1 is the bearded reedling *Panurus biarmicus* which occasionally breeds on the site. The reedbed is used as a roost by a variety of birds on passage, such as yellow wagtail *Motacilla flava* and swallow *Hirundo rustica*.