

COUNTY: Norfolk

SITE NAME: BRIDGHAM AND BRETTHENHAM HEATHS

DISTRICT: Breckland

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

Local Planning Authority: Breckland District Council

National Grid Reference: TL 922865

Area: 446 [ha] 1102 [ac]

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 144

1:10,000: TL 98 NW

Date Notified [Under 1949 Act]: 1970

Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified [Under 1981 Act]: 1982

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

The site is listed in “A Nature Conservation Review” edited by D A Ratcliffe (1977).

### **Description and Reasons for Notification:**

Bridgham and Brettenham Heaths are linked via East Wretham Heath to the Stanford Training Area, forming the largest remaining block of Breckland heath. This is a very localised and declining habitat. The soils are predominantly acidic sands, heavily podsolised in places, but chalk comes near to the surface towards the eastern boundary. The vegetation is mainly heather and acidic grassland with considerable areas of bracken and some scrub. However it also includes small areas of neutral and calcareous grassland to the east and associated with “patterned ground”: stripes and polygons or nets formed during the last glaciation.

The dry acid heath is dominated by Wavy Hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa* and Heather *Calluna vulgaris*, over which there is substantial invasion by Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*. Other species associated with this heathland include Sand Sedge *Carex arenaria*, Pill Sedge *C. pilulifera*, Heath Wood-rush *Luzula multiflora*, Harebell *Campanula rotundifolia*, Tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, Heath Bedstraw *Galium saxatile* and the lichens *Cladonia impexa* and *C. pyxidata*. Where conditions are damper, or (as on Brettenham Heath) where agricultural improvement may have taken place, Smooth Meadow-grass *Poa pratensis*, Red Fescue *Festuca rubra*, False Oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius* and Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus* are also present.

Where the chalk’s influence is felt, more species-rich neutral to calcareous grassland occurs. This is dominated mainly by Sweet Vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, Smooth Meadow-grass and Red Fescue, but also includes such species as Meadow Oat-grass *Avenula pratense*, Yellow Oat-grass *Trisetum flavescens*, Field Wood-rush *Luzula campestris*, Dropwort *Filipendula vulgaris*, Stemless Thistle *Cirsium acaule*, Wild Thyme *Thymus praecox*, Biting Stonecrop *Sedum acre* and the rare Drooping Brome *Bromus tectorum*.

Scrub is scattered over parts of the site and is dense in places. Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, young Silver Birch *Betula pendula* and Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris* seedlings are all locally abundant, with some Gorse *Ulex europaeus* and Broom *Cytisus scoparius*. There are several areas of woodland, mainly dominated by Silver Birch but including locally frequent Oak *Quercus robur* and Scots Pine.

The site is notable for breeding nightjar and common curlew but also supports many other breeding bird species, including redstart, wheatear, stonechat and whinchat. Stone curlew are occasionally seen there.

Green Hairstreak and Purple Hairstreak butterflies are amongst the species recorded for the site.