

COUNTY: CHESHIRE

SITE NAME: DANES MOSS

DISTRICT: Macclesfield

SITE REF: 15WY3

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

Local Planning Authority: CHESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL, Macclesfield Borough Council

National Grid Reference: SJ 907706, SJ 911704      Area: 52.7 (ha.) 130.2 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 118      1:10,000: SJ 97 SW

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 18/10/85      Date of Last Revision: 6/11/92

Other Information:

Site boundary alteration (extension). Part of the site is a Nature Reserve managed by Cheshire Wildlife Trust.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

The meres and mosses of the north west Midlands form a nationally important series of open water and peatland sites not represented elsewhere in lowland Britain. They have developed in natural depressions in the glacial drift left by ice sheets as they retreated from the Cheshire-Shropshire plain some 15,000 years ago. The majority lie in Cheshire and north Shropshire, with a small number of outlying sites in adjacent parts of Staffordshire and Clwyd. A series of extensive mosses also occurs to the south west of Manchester.

Although the majority of the meres are nutrient rich (eutrophic) the water chemistry is very variable reflecting the variable nature of the drift deposits surrounding each site. Associated fringing habitats such as reedswamp, fen, carr and damp pasture add to the value of the meres.

The development of these associated habitats has often resulted in peat accumulation which, in some cases, has led to the complete infilling of the basin. During this process the nutrient status of the peat surface changes and typically becomes nutrient poor (oligotrophic) and acidic thus allowing species such as the bog mosses *Sphagnum* spp. to colonise it. The resulting peat bogs are the mosses.

Danes Moss which lies 3 km south of Macclesfield is the largest example in Cheshire of a cut-over raised mire and its topographical location, on the watershed draining north to the River Bollin and south to the River Dane, is particularly unusual. The substantial thickness of the residual peat, up to five metres over the majority of the site, and its flat surface present excellent conditions for rewetting and restoration of active peat forming processes, making this mossland a valuable example of a habitat now rare in lowland England. The area of least cut peat lies to the south east of the railway line and supports the largest stand of bog myrtle *Myrica gale* in Cheshire.

A central part of the site has already been successfully flooded by the installation of strategically placed dams. The depth of the water varies because old cuttings, peat baulks, and drains have been inundated. While the tops of old baulks which emerge from the water remain colonised by purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* and heather *Calluna vulgaris* the areas of shallow open water contain tussocks of common cottongrass *Eriophorum angustifolium*, hare's-tail cottongrass *E. vaginatum*, soft-rush *Juncus effusus* and increasing areas of *Sphagnum* moss.

Over the site as a whole seven species of *Sphagnum* moss can be found, notably *S. cuspidatum*, *S. subnitens* and *S. papillosum* which represent successional stages in the development of a raised mire. One area of the site is dominated by cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix* and cranberry *Vaccinium oxycoccus* over a *Sphagnum recurvum* carpet, and damp ditches locally support a number of Cheshire's uncommon wetland plants such as round-leaved sundew *Drosera rotundifolia*, marsh cinquefoil *Potentilla palustris* and bottle sedge *Carex rostrata*. Labrador-tea *Ledum palustre*, a nationally rare plant, was previously recorded in the small area planted with conifers in the 1950s, but cuttings from the original stock have since been re-introduced into a more open part of the site. The southern margin of the peat body has been used agriculturally, resulting in the development of peaty pasture which supports botanically diverse acidic grassland communities with species such as lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica* and fen bedstraw *Galium uliginosum*, both of which are also uncommon in Cheshire, and the mosses *Sphagnum* spp. and *Aulacomnium palustre*. On drier peripheral areas oaks *Quercus robur* and *Q. petraea* and, notably, alder buckthorn *Frangula alnus* have become established.

The varied wetland habitats of the mossland support populations of Cheshire's scarcer insects with 11 species of damselfly and dragonfly including the black darter *Sympetrum danae* and four-spotted chaser *Libellula quadrimaculata* and the butterflies brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni* and green hairstreak *Callophrys rubi*.

The common lizard *Lacerta vivipara* is also recorded.