

**County:** Hampshire **Site Name:** Shortheath Common SSSI

**Local Planning Authority:** Hampshire County Council, East Hampshire District Council

**National Grid Reference:** SU 775366

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:** 186 **1:25,000:** SU 73

**Area:** 58.0 (ha) 143.32 (ac)

**Date Notified (Under 1949 Act):** 1974 **Date of Last Revision:** –

**Date Notified (Under 1981 Act):** 1985 **Date of Last Revision:** –

**Other Information:**

Owned by the Ministry of Defence. Registered and confirmed as a common.

**Reasons for Notification:**

Shortheath Common embraces a wide range of heathland habitats on the Folkestone Beds of the western Weald. Though the site has become extensively colonised within the past 80–110 years by bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and oak *Quercus*/birch *Betula* woodland, large areas of open heathland and habitats remain and the seral stages of the succession to oakwood contribute to the considerable habitat diversity of the site as a whole. The focal point of the Common is a substantial valley mire of outstanding structural and biological interest. *Sphagnum* mosses dominate over much of the mire surface, but a wide range of higher plants occur, including common reedmace *Typha latifolia*, velvet bent *Agrostis canina*, marsh cinquefoil *Potentilla palustris*, soft and sharp-flowered rushes *Juncus effusus* and *J. acutiflorus*, the insectivorous round-leaved sundew *Drosera rotundifolia*, and a large population of cranberry *Vaccinium oxycoccus*, a low-growing shrub now rare and declining in southern England. Cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix*, purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, bog pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*, and common sallow *Salix cinerea* occur as a wet-heath community at the mire margins, but this transitional zone quickly grades into acid grassland with relic dry heath dominated by ling *Calluna vulgaris* with bell heather *Erica cinerea*, dwarf gorse *Ulex minor* and *Cladonia* lichens.

The margins of Shortheath Pond have been partially modified for fishing, but the pond retains an interesting emergent and bankside vegetation which includes abundant greater bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus uliginosus*, gipsywort *Lycopus europaeus*, skullcap *Scutellaria galericulata*, nodding bur-marigold *Bidens cernua*, marsh pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, water mint *Mentha aquatica* and bog St John's-wort *Hypericum elodes*.

The invertebrate fauna of the Common, and in particular of the pond, mire and peripheral habitats, is of special interest. It includes 23 breeding species of dragonflies, including a number which are rare or local, e.g. *Cordulia aenea*, *Erythromma najas*, *Orthetrum coerulescens* and *Anax imperator*, and a colony of the rare damselfly *Ceriagrion tenellum*. The full heathland range of Orthoptera is represented, with good populations of the bog bush cricket *Metrioptera brachyptera* and mottled grasshopper *Myrmeleottetix maculatus*. The grayling *Hipparchia semele*, purple hairstreak *Quercusia quercus* and purple emperor *Apatura iris* butterflies are present in substantial populations. Silver-studded blue butterflies *Plebejus argus* have become increasingly scarce in recent years but populations persist on the *Calluna* dominant areas of heathland. The distinctly local argent-and-sable moth *Rheumaptera hastata* also occurs in an apparently atypical heathland habitat.