

**County:** Hampshire **Site Name:** Sowley Pond SSSI

**Local Planning Authority:** Hampshire County Council, New Forest District Council

**National Grid Reference:** SZ 374967

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:** 196 **1:25,000:** SZ 39

**Area:** 47.97 (ha) 118.54 (ac)

**Date Notified (Under 1949 Act):** 1971 **Date of Last Revision:** –

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

**Other Information:**

**Reasons for Notification:**

Sowley Pond is an important refuge for both surface feeding and diving ducks and in this respect functions as an integral part of the marshland system of the west Solent, which includes Hurst Castle to Lymington River Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest and the North Solent Site of Special Scientific Interest and National Nature Reserve. The pond is surrounded by mature oak *Quercus* and Scots pine *Pinus sylvestris* woodland which supports the largest Hampshire heronry. Sowley Pond was formed in the fourteenth century by damming a small stream, and in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries became a hammer pond for an ironworks situated close to the present dam.

The numbers of ducks have fluctuated widely over the years but the pond has supported some hundreds of moulting mallard in the summer and it is used as a daytime roost by several hundred wigeon *Anas penelope* and teal *A. crecca* in winter. Numbers of tufted duck *Aythya fuligula* and pochard *A. ferina* are often substantial. Breeding wetland birds include mallard, tufted duck and great crested grebes *Podiceps cristatus*. The heronry (grey heron *Ardea cinerea*), at present (1984) in mature Scots pine, has increased steadily since the 1960s and in 1984 held 60 occupied nests.

The woodland elements of the SSSI are mainly secondary plantations dating from the nineteenth century. They are included in the SSSI in order to safeguard the heronry and allow for periodic movement of the nesting area; and to ensure adequate seclusion for the pond. However, they also possess considerable intrinsic interest owing to the abundance of mature and decaying timber, a well developed shrub layer of hazel *Corylus avellana* and hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, and a comparatively well developed flora which includes at least some species characteristic of ancient woodland. There is a notable abundance of butcher's brome *Ruscus aculeatus* and wood spurge *Euphorbia amygdaloides*, which is usually an indication of long persistence of woodland or wood pasture in central southern England. It is probable that open pasture adjoined parts of the Pond until it was planted with oak and Scots pine.