

File ref:

**County:** Hampshire **Site Name:** Ratlake Meadows SSSI

**Local Planning Authority:** Hampshire County Council, Test Valley Borough Council

**National Grid Reference:** SU 415236

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:** 185 **1:25,000:** SU 42

**Area:** 4.5 (ha) 11.11 (ac)

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

**Date Notified (Under 1981 Act):** 1986 **Date of Last Revision:** –

**Other Information:**

**Reasons for Notification:**

Ratlake Meadows are among the most species-rich of the remaining known examples of agriculturally unimproved meadows on acid-to-neutral soils in the Hampshire Basin. They lie on London Clay and are mainly dominated by a mixture of grasses, including sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, heath grass *Danthonia decumbens*, tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa* and Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*. Herbs are abundant in the sward and meadow thistle *Cirsium dissectum*, sneezewort *Achillea ptarmica* and black knapweed *Centaurea nigra* are locally dominant. Other abundant species characteristic of base-poor soils include oval sedge *Carex ovalis*, pill sedge *Carex pilulifera*, heath spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza maculata*, heath wood-rush *Luzula multiflora* and tormentil *Potentilla erecta*. Other species common in the sward include common fleabane *Pulicaria dysenterica*, meadow vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis*, fen bedstraw *Galium uliginosum*, bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* and silverweed *Potentilla anserina*. In damper areas, towards the slope foot, water mint *Mentha aquatica*, carnation sedge *Carex panicea* and common marsh bedstraw *Galium palustre* are prominent in the plant community. Besides heath spotted orchids, there are populations of closely related common spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* and southern marsh orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*, and hybrids between them. At least 18 species of plants occur which are considered indicative of long continuity of habitat: the meadows are known to have been extant in at least the 16th century and are probably of much greater antiquity.

The abundance of herbs, and the shelter provided both by neighbouring woodland and internal belts of oaks, comprise optimal conditions for invertebrates. The meadows are known to support a population of the rare long-winged conehead *Conocephalus discolor* and a variety of grassland butterflies.

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