

COUNTY: HEREFORD AND WORCESTER

SITE NAME: THE FLITS

DISTRICT: SOUTH HEREFORD, LEOMINSTER

SITE REF: 15 OW6

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

Local Planning Authority: HEREFORD AND WORCESTER COUNTY COUNCIL, South Herefordshire District Council, Leominster District Council

National Grid Reference: SO 378410

Area: 35.45 (ha.) 87.60 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 149

1:10,000: SO 34 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): –

Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985

Date of Last Revision: 1992

Other Information:

Boundary alteration (extension notified 23.3.92).

Reasons for Notification:

The site lies in the flood plain of the River Wye six miles north-west of the City of Hereford. The soils are a mixture of peat and calcareous organic marls deposited in a glacial channel. The lower ground is water-logged even during the summer. The higher ground is drier and more freely drained. A series of flushes both acidic and calcareous occur.

Most of the site is marshy grassland. A considerable variety of plants achieve local dominance and these include rushes *Juncus articulatus* and *J. effusus*, Meadow-sweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, water mint *Mentha aquatica*, marsh marigold *Caltha palustris*, great hairy willow-herb *Epilobium hirsutum* and fleabane *Pulicaria dysenterica*. In the wettest areas marsh arrowgrass *Triglochin palustris*, bog pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*, marsh pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, bur-reed *Sparganium erectum*, yellow flag *Iris pseudacorus* and water plantain *Alisma plantago-aquatica* are present. The sedge communities are diverse with hairy sedge *Carex hirta*, common sedge *C. nigra* and great pond-sedge *C. riparia* occupying large areas.

On the higher, better drained areas grasses such as meadow foxtail *Alopecurus pratensis*, sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and crested dog's tail *Cynosurus cristatus* are dominant. Herb species include cowslip *Primula veris*, hairy St John's wort *Hypericum hirsutum* and square-stemmed St. John's wort *H. tetrapterum*, lady's bedstraw *Galium verum*, yellow rattle *Rhinanthus minor* and hoary plantain *Plantago media*. Twayblade *Listera ovata* and spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* are numerous in these areas.

Part of the site along the stream is covered by alder *Alnus glutinosa* coppice, and alder has colonised part of the adjoining grassland. A number of interesting plant communities occupy the open glades that exist in these alder zones and they contain locally rare species such as bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*, marsh valerian *Valeriana dioica* and meadow saffron *Colchicum autumnale*. An outstanding feature is the presence of globe flower *Trollius europaeus* which is here near the southern limit of its range in Britain.

The hedgerows and associated colonising scrub communities which have partially invaded the grassland contribute to the site's overall value. In the wetter areas crack willow *Salix fragilis*, sallow *S. cinerea* and guelder rose *Viburnum opulus* are common. Drier parts have hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* and hazel *Corylus avellana* with the occasional spindle *Euonymus europaeus* and buckthorn *Rhamnus cartharticus*.

The site is nationally important for its invertebrate fauna. Preliminary studies show that exceptional assemblages of sub-aquatic and aquatic species occur in the area, particularly associated with the seepages and streams. Most noteworthy are the Stratiomydes (Soldier flies) eight species of which have been recorded. Four uncommon Tipulids (Crane flies) and twelve species of Sciomyzids (Snail flies) have also been recorded. The Coleoptera include *Cassida murraea* at its only known Herefordshire locality. Over 200 species of Lepidoptera have been recorded of which six are not known from any other locality in this part of the country. A scarce bee and a scarce sawfly have also been recorded.

The site is also important as a breeding site for wetland birds such as snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, curlew *Numenius arquata* and lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, which find the marshy conditions, size and seclusion of the area ideal.