

COUNTY: KENT      SITE NAME: STODMARSH

DISTRICT: CANTERBURY

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

Local Planning Authority: Canterbury City Council

National Grid Reference: TR 222618      Area: 604.4 (ha.) 1493.4 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 179      1:10,000: TR 15 NE, TR 16 SE, TR 26 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1951      Date of Last Revision: 1981

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

Other Information:

Part of the site is described in 'A Nature Conservation Reviews'. Part of this site is a National Nature Reserve (NNR).

Description:

This wetland site located in the Stour valley contains a wide range of habitats including open water, extensive reedbeds, scrub and alder carr which together support a rich flora and fauna. The vegetation is a good example of a southern eutrophic flood plain and a number of rare plants are found here. The invertebrate fauna is varied and several scarce moths have been recorded in recent years. The site is also of ornithological interest with its diverse breeding bird community. Two rare British birds cetti's warbler and bearded tit, regularly breed in nationally significant numbers.

*The gravel pits*

In the western part of the site are a number of disused and flooded gravel pits with many spits and islands. In places there is a fringe of aquatic vegetation although some areas have been eroded by boating and angling. Willow and bramble scrub is well developed around the margins and also on the relatively undisturbed islands. A variety of birds use the lakes for breeding and wintering. Notable among the breeding birds are great crested grebe and tufted duck: also the rare cetti's warbler which favours the low bramble scrub.

*The lagoons and reedbeds*

Most of the central part of the site has subsided and flooded due to past mining at the nearby Chislet colliery. The resulting lagoons of various sizes are an important refuge for wildfowl and are also used for breeding by great crested grebe and coot. Some of the lagoons are open to the Great Stour and the water levels fluctuate with the tide.

Extensive beds of common reed *Phragmites australis* have developed on the peaty soils around the lagoons. Reedbeds of this size are scarce in Britain and form an important breeding habitat for several birds such as reed and sedge warblers, reed buntings and the rare bearded tit. Large flocks of swallows, martins and wagtails use the reedbeds on spring and autumn passage. In winter there is often a large roost of corn buntings and in recent years up to 20 hen harriers have also been present.

A variety of moths are also known from this habitat. Species characteristic of the reedbeds include the reed dagger *Simyra albovenosa*, obscure wainscot *Mythimna obsoleta* and silky wainscot *Chilodes maritimus*.

A number of scarce fen plants occur in areas where the reed has been cut, and also along the open dykes intersecting the reedbeds. Species include greater bladderwort

*Urticularis vulgaris*, greater spearwort *Ranunculus lingua* and bog bean *Menyanthes trifoliata*. These dykes also contain some rare aquatic plants, for example sharp-leaved pondweed *Potamogeton acutifolius* and rootless duckweed *Wolffia arrhiza*.

#### *The grassland*

The large area of grassland to the east of the reedbeds is mainly cattle-grazed pasture with intersecting dykes. The flora is similar to that described above, although in some places the dykes are choked with reed. Waders such as redshank, lapwing and snipe breed on the fields. In winter and at times of passage flocks of waders, ducks and sometimes geese feed and roost here.

#### *The birds*

The site is important for birds throughout the year, particularly in the breeding season. Mallard is the most common breeding duck but scarce species such as gadwall, shoveler and pochard also breed most years. The first British breeding record for cetti's warbler was at Stodmarsh in 1972 and the species has since become more widely distributed. In winter large numbers of wildfowl including mallard, teal, wigeon, pochard and tufted duck are present.