

COUNTY: KENT SITE NAME: NORTHWARD HILL (High Halstow NNR)

DISTRICT: ROCHESTER-UPON-MEDWAY

Status: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. This site is a National Nature Reserve (NNR)

Local Planning Authority: ROCHESTER-UPON-MEDWAY CITY COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: TQ 781763 Area: 52.5 (ha.) 129.7 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 178 1:10,000: TQ 77 NE

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

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

Other Information:

The site is included in ‘A Nature Conservation Review’.

It was declared a National Nature Reserve in 1951.

The Reserve is managed by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

Reasons for Notification:

The most important feature of the site is the heronry which at over 200 the pairs is the largest in Britain. There is a diverse breeding bird community and the insect fauna is also of interest particularly moths and butterflies. The site consists of mixed deciduous woodland and scrub with some open areas of grassland and bracken. A number of small ponds are present and also a few open ditches.

The woodland, situated on London Clay, comprises damp oakwood and old hawthorn scrub invaded by sycamore. English elm was formerly abundant but has largely been killed by Dutch elm disease although there is now some vigorous sucker regeneration. The understorey and shrub layer of elder and hawthorn is dense in places. The ground flora is dominated by ivy *Hedera helix*, bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*. However, overall the wood has a diverse flora with over 200 plants recorded, including trees and shrubs.

The eradication of sycamore and thinning of dense scrub are part of the current management of the reserve to establish and maintain open areas for breeding shelduck, mallard, and heathland birds. The mosaic of woodland, scrub and glades forms an attractive breeding habitat for warblers.

A number of scarce moths have been recorded in recent years including the sloe carpet *Aleucis distincta* and least carpet *Idaea vulpinaria*. There is a colony of the white-letter hairstreak butterfly *Strymonidia w-album* on the Reserve, a species which has declined as a result of Dutch elm disease. In addition 9 species of

dragonfly have been recorded recently including the scarce ruddy darter
Sympetrum sanguineum.