

COUNTY: KENT **SITE NAME:** HOLBOROUGH TO BURHAM MARSHES

DISTRICT: TONBRIDGE AND MALLING

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

Local Planning Authority: Tonbridge and Malling District Council

National Grid Reference: TQ 712618 **Area:** 148.50 (ha.) 366.94 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 188 **1:10,000:** TQ 76 SW

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1990

Other Information:

Part of this site is a Kent Trust for Nature Conservation reserve known as Burham Marshes. The site has been extended to include Abbey Heads and Abbey Mead Lake and there have also been some other minor boundary amendments.

Reasons for Notification:

This site lies along the flood plain of the River Medway, which at this point is still tidal. A variety of habitats are present including extensive reedbeds, open water, fen, grassland, scrub and woodland. The many different habitats support a wide variety of breeding birds and the site is also important for wintering wildfowl and waders. A number of scarce wetland plants occur and it is also a locality of a rare moth, a rare beetle, and 3 rare bee species.

The reedbeds

The extensive reedbeds, subject to occasional tidal flooding, are dominated by common reed *Phragmites australis*. Scarce plants include marsh sow-thistle *Sonchus palustris* and marsh mallow *Althaea officinalis*; the latter is the larval an o e nationally rare marsh-mallow moth *Hydraecia osseota* which is also found here. Many typical reedbed birds breed in areas including reed warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*, water rail *Rallus aquaticus* and occasionally bearded tit *Panarus biarmicus*. In addition large flocks of swallows *Hirundo rustica*, and sand martins *Riparia riparia* roost in the reed beds in autumn together with wagtails *Motacilla species* which remain for the winter.

Fen and grassland

The area of fen in the western part of Holborough Marshes has the most species-rich plant community. Sedges *Carex* species and rushes *Juncus* species are the dominant plants. Many wetland plants which now have a restricted distribution are present including slender spike-rush *Eleocharis uniglumis* and brookweed *Samolus valerandi*. A number of orchid species also occur.

Alluvial grassland is an increasingly uncommon habitat; here it is dominated by grasses such as creeping bent *Agrostis stolonifera*, red fescue *Festuca rubra* and cock's foot *Dactylis glomerata* and the scarce divided sedge *Carex divisa* is also round. The ditches and dykes within this habitat, are of botanical interest; the majority are dominated by common reed and greater pond-sedge *Carex riparia*. On the eastern bank of the Medway however the ditches tend to be fairly brackish and also contain plants such as sea club-rush *Scirpus maritimus* and soft hornwort *Ceratophyllum submersum* which are tolerant of these conditions. Those of Holborough Marshes on the western bank are less brackish; opposite-leaved pondweed *Groenlandia densa* and greater bladderwort *Utricularia vulgaris* grow in this area, both of which are scarce in Kent.

The diversity of habitats supports many interesting invertebrates, including a good representation of characteristic wetland species and a significant number of nationally scarce species together with 5 nationally rare species including the marsh-mallow moth and rove beetle *Stenus calcaratus* and the blue carpenter bee *Ceratina cyanea*.

Standing water frequently collects on the pasture during wet weather and attracts many birds. Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* and redshank *Tringa totanus* regularly breed in these areas and in winter many wildfowl and waders gather including teal *Anas crecca*, shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* and snipe *Gallinago gallinago*.

Woodland and scrub

There are several areas of dense scrub within the site consisting mainly of hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* with alder *Alnus glutinosa* in the wetter areas. At the southern end, surrounding a large reedbed is a damp woodland of alder and crack willow *Salix fragilis* with some ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and oak *Quercus robur* on drier ground. The ground flora, particularly in the wetter areas resembles that of the adjacent reedbed with a predominance of common reed in places.

Yellow flag *Iris pseudacorus*, great horsetail *Equisetum telmateia* and hemlock water-dropwort *Oenanthe crocata* also occur. Typical woodland birds such as tree creeper *Certhia familiaris* and great spotted woodpecker *Dendropus major* breed. Many other birds breed both in the wood and the patches of scrub, including nightingale *Lucinia megarhynchos* and on occasions the rare cetti's warbler *Cettia cetti*.

Abbey Mead Lake

This is regarded as the most attractive to birds of the several flooded gravel pits in this area. It is especially important for wintering flocks of wildfowl including tufted duck *Aythya fuligula*, pochard *Aythya ferina*, gadwall *Anas strepera* and wigeon *Anas penelope* particularly in very cold weather when pochard may occasionally be present in nationally significant numbers. There is some marginal aquatic vegetation of lesser and greater reed-mace, *Typha angustifolia* and *T. latifolia*, common reed, sea club-rush and greater pond-sedge. Around the periphery of the lake there is some pasture with scattered hawthorn, some small reedbeds and patches of dense scrub. The bankside vegetation and surrounding scrub support a variety of breeding birds including nightingale, lesser whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*, reed *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*, grasshopper *Locustella naevia* and sedge warblers *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* and in most recent years cetti's warbler. Cetti's warbler is a very restricted breeding species in Britain, and prior to the hard winter of 1986/87 the number of pairs around Abbey Mead Lake was of national significance.