

COUNTY: BERKSHIRE **SITE NAME:** SULHAM AND TIDMARSH WOODS AND MEADOWS

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

Local Planning Authorities: Newbury District Council, Berkshire County Council

National Grid Reference: SU635741, SU641735, SU640750

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 175 **1:10,000:** SU67 SW, SU67 NW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1954 **Date of Last Revision:** 1970

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

Area: 73.8 ha 182.3 ac

Other information: Originally known as Pang Valley SSSI, the present name was adopted following further boundary revisions. Most of the southern portion forms the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Naturalists Trust's Moor Copse Nature Reserve. The whole site lies within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Description and Reasons for Notification

The River Pang and Sulham Brook occupy a broad valley of unusually varied alluvial loams, gravel terraces and peat deposits, resulting from incursion during late glacial times by an enlarged River Kennet. This variety in soils and topography is reflected in a mosaic of damp copses and seasonally flooded meadow communities, all now much reduced in southern England through intensified management and urban encroachment, but maintained here by a long history of coppicing and sympathetic grassland husbandry.

The woods are essentially wet valley alderwoods with a mixture of other trees and shrubs including ash, birch, gean, oak, hazel, willows, guelder rose *Viburnum opulus* and spindle *Euonymus europaeus*. Locally there are small plantations of poplar *Populus* sp., some with a few conifers. A number of compartments are actively coppiced, and all the copses support a rich ground flora which varies according to the degree of shade and wetness. Characteristic woodland plants are primrose *Primula vulgaris* Ramsons *Allium ursinum*, bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, bugle *Ajuga reptans*, enchanter's nightshade *Circaea lutetiana*, wood spurge *Euphorbia amygdaloides*, sanicle *Sanicula europaea*, wood sedge *Carex strigosa* and *C. sylvatica*, early purple orchid *Orchis mascula*, twayblade *Listera ovata* and Solomon's seal *Polygonatum multiflorum*. In the wetter parts of the woods, the field layer is more marshy in character, with yellow flag *Iris pseudacorus*, water mint *Mentha aquatica*, valerian *Valeriana officinalis*, yellow loosestrife *Lysimachia vulgaris*, comfrey *Symphytum officinale*, meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, large bittercress *Cardamine amara*, marsh marigold *Caltha palustris* and opposite-leaved golden saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*.

The meadows, which are grazed by cattle and horses and cut for hay, range from relatively dry acid grassland on the ridges and hummocks, to damp neutral pasture on the lower lying ground with a higher water table. Grasses of the drier areas include creeping bent *Acrostis stolonifera*, red fescue *Festuca rubra*, sweet vernal grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, heath grass *Danthonia decumbens*, cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata* and Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus*. Herbs include harebell *Campanula rotundifolia*, fiddle dock *Rumex pulcher*, tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, lady's bedstraw *Galium verum*, betony *Stachys officinalis* and centaury *Centaurea erythraea*. The dog violet *Viola canina* occurred formerly and may still be present. The dry hummocks support two uncommon dwarf-shrubs, dwarf gorse *Ulex minor* and petty whin *Genista anglica*.

In the wetter areas grasses include tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa*, floating sweet-grass *Glyceria fluitans* and marshy foxtail *Alopecurus geniculatus*. The dominant sedge is hairy sedge *Carex hirta*, though oval, common and carnation sedges, *C. nigra* and *C. panicea*, as well as others, occur together with rushes *Juncus* sp., common spike-rush *Eleocharis palustris* and bristle club-rush *Scirpus setaceus*. The adder's tongue fern *Ophioglossum vulgatum* is

abundant in places, while along the numerous herbs, notable species are devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, ragged-Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, great burnet

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Sanguisorba officinalis, sneezewort *Achillea ptarmica*, pepper saxifrage *Silaum silaus*, water avens *Geum rivale*, purple loosestrife *Lythrum salicaria* and southern marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*.

The whole site supports a rich invertebrate fauna, but so far attention has been focused on the woods where, in the Moor Copse complex, over 300 species of moth have been recorded, of which notable examples are the water carpet *Lampropteryx suffumata*, scarlet tiger *Callimorpha dominula*, white marked *Cerastis leucographa*, waved black *Parascotia fuliginaria* and the very local micromoth *Micropterix mansuetella*. Butterflies include white admiral *Ladoga camilla* and purple and white-letter hairstreaks *Quercusia quercus* and *Strymonidium w-album*. Various other invertebrate groups are known to be well represented, eg molluscs, of which 45 species have been recorded to date, and flies, which include two rarities *Oxycera analis* and *Nemoteius pantherimus*.