

COUNTY: WEST SUSSEX

SITE NAME: AMBERLEY WILD BROOKS

DISTRICT: HORSHAM; CHICHESTER

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

Local Planning Authority: Horsham District Council; Chichester District Council

National Grid Ref: TQ 033142 Area: 322.6 ha 797.1 acres

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 197 1:10,000: TQ 01 SW, TQ 01 NW

Date Notified (under 1949 Act): 1954 Date of Last Revision: 1980

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985 Date of Last Revision: -

Other Information: This site lies within the Greensand Natural Area, and is within the South Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Small parts of the site are reserves of the Sussex Trust for Nature Conservation

Reasons for Notification:

An extensive area of alluvial grazing marsh which is dissected by drainage ditches. The ditches support a rich flora which includes one nationally rare plant. The numbers of birds which over-winter are nationally significant and the site also has a rich community of breeding birds. Several uncommon invertebrates are present including a rich assemblage of dragonflies.

The site lies on greensand and river alluvium although there is an area of peat in the north which represents the only sizeable example of a relict raised bog in the south east. Southern parts of the site are fed by calcareous springs whose influence declines to the north. The variation in chemical status of the water in the ditches has allowed the development of a remarkable flora which includes the cut grass *Leersia oryzoides*, a plant which is restricted to ten UK locations. The grassland itself supports a number of interesting plants in places but where left ungrazed, has developed into fen, scrub and onto woodland.

The wettest parts of the marsh are dominated by soft rush *Juncus effusus*, sedges *Carex* species, tussock grass *Deschampsia cespitosa* are lesser spearwort *Ranunculus flammula* but drier fields, particularly in the south, have meadow grasses *Poa* species, crested dog's tail grass *Cynosurus cristatus* and rye grass *Lolium perenne*. Species of note from the wettest grazing marsh include fen orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*, true fox sedge *Carex vulpina* and marsh cinquefoil *Potentilla palustris*. The ditches which dissect the grazing marsh support 156 species of flowering plant. In addition to the rare cut grass the flora includes all five British duckweeds *Lemna* species, all three British water-milfoils *Myriophyllum* species, all five British water-cresses *Rorippa* species, all but one of the seven British water dropworts *Oenanthe* species and two-thirds of the British pondweeds *Potamogeton* species including the uncommon *Potamogeton acutifolius*. Other notable plants include greater water-parsnip *Sium latifolium*, small water pepper *Polygonum minus*, greater bladderwort *Utricularia vulgaris*, frogbit *Hydrocharis morsus-ranae* and flowering rush *Butomus umbellatus*.

Fen areas consist of reed *Phragmites australis*, reed sweet grass *Glyceria maxima* and tussock sedge *Carex paniculata*. Sallow *Salix cinerea* and elder *Sambucus nigre* scrub is scattered throughout the fen. The marsh fern *Thelypteris thelypteroides* is an uncommon plant associated with this fen. In places woodland has colonised over the fen and consists of alder *Alnus glutinosa*, white willow *Salix alba*, sallow and down

birch *Betula pubescens*. On drier ground hazel *Corylus avellana* and pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* occur above a rich ground flora which includes bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* and yellow archangel *Lamium galeobdolon*. Two particularly rare fungi occur under woodland at this site: *Russula sphagnophila* in its only UK location, and *Eccilia paludicola* in one of its three known world localities.

The wet alluvial marsh is valuable for wintering birds: 102 species have been recorded including nationally significant numbers of teal, shoveler and Bewick's swan. The site supports 57 species of breeding birds and is one of the most important wet meadow sites in the country for breeding redshank. Other breeding birds include ground nesting species such as snipe, fenland birds such as reed warbler and woodland birds like green woodpecker. Seventeen species of dragonfly breed including the uncommon *Cordulia aenea*. This is also the locality for two rare snails (molluscs): *Anisus vorticulatus* and *Pseudamnicola confusa*.