

COUNTY: NORFOLK            SITE NAME: SMALLBURGH FEN

DISTRICT: NORTH NORFOLK

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

Local Planning Authority: North Norfolk District Council

National Grid Reference: TG 327246            Area: 7.27 (ha.) 17.96 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 134            1:10,000: TG 32 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1972            Date of Last Revision: –

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

Other Information:

The site is listed in 'A Nature Conservation Review' (1977 Cambridge University Press, ed. Ratcliffe).

Description:

Smallburgh Fen is a small spring-fed valley fen bordering a minor tributary of the River Ant. It is of exceptional ecological interest and is considered to be the second most important example of this type of fen in Norfolk. In the central part of the site open, moss-dominated communities have developed under the influence of the irrigating chalk-rich spring waters and here a very diverse plant community is present which includes a number of rare and local species, all restricted to this uncommon habitat type.

The central fen is characterised by a short-sward community with abundant black bog-rush *Schoenus nigricans* and a well-developed bryophyte carpet which includes the mosses *Campylium stellatum*, *Drepanocladus revolvens*, *Acrocladium cuspidatum*, and *Lophocolea bidentata*. Wet hollows within this area contain stoneworts *Chara spp.* Associated herbs and sedges include such characteristic species as grass of parnassus *Parnassia palustris*, bog pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*, bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*, marsh helleborine *Epipactis palustris*, marsh valerian *Valeriana dioica*, marsh pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, glaucous sedge *Carex flacca* and dioecious sedge *Carex dioica*. A taller vegetation has developed away from the seepage points and this is characterised by blunt-flowered rush *Juncus subnodulosus*, marsh fern *Thelypteris thelypteroides* and southern marsh orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*. On the margin where some scrub development has occurred there are tussocks of the bog moss *Sphagnum palustre*.

Surrounding the moss-dominated communities is a patchily developed zone of ranker fen vegetation. Reed is dominant with other tall species present including meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria* and hemp agrimony *Eupatorium cannabinum*.

Carr woodland occupies the remainder of the site. Alder is dominant with brown birch and common sallow. The ground flora is generally typical of a Broadland alder carr, with lesser pond sedge *Carex acutiformis*, marsh fern, meadowsweet and broad buckler fern *Dryopteris dilatata*.

The site also forms the only known Norfolk locality for the rare moss *Brachythecium mildeanum*.

