

County: Cumbria

Site Name: Claife Tarns and Mires

District: South Lakeland

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

Local Planning Authority: Lake District Special Planning Board

National Grid Reference: SD 375980 **Area:** 145.0 (ha) 358.6 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 96, 97 **1:10,000:** SD 39 NE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1965 **Date of Last Revision:** 1975

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

Other Information:

1. The boundary has been modified by partial deletion and extension at renotification.
2. The site name was previously 'Claife Heights SSSI'.
3. The site lies within the Lake District National Park.

Reasons for Notification:

Claife Tarns and Mires SSSI lies between 150 and 251 metres O.D. on the undulating plateau of Claife Heights, an area of low fell land between Lake Windermere and Esthwaite Water. Much of this area has been afforested with conifer plantations but these are dissected by a network of small streams and mires, many of which were dammed in the 19th century to form small, artificial tarns. The site encompasses several of these tarns and a number of valley and basin mires, habitats which are nationally rare and scarce in South Cumbria. This diverse association of tarns and mires is of particular importance for its rich wetland flora and also because it supports an outstanding assemblage of dragonflies including both uncommon and rare species.

There are three main basin mires, within the site, Nor Moss, Highs Moss and Ustick Moss. Nor Moss is the largest and supports a particularly diverse mire flora. Open bog pools with white water lily *Nymphaea alba*, bog pondweed *Potamogeton polygonifolius* and greater bladderwort *Utricularia vulgaris* occur in a mosaic with floating *Sphagnum* communities comprised of over eight species of *Sphagnum*, with marsh lousewort *Pedicularis palustris*, bog asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum*, common cottongrass *Eriophorum angustifolium*, white-beak sedge *Rhynchospora alba*, dioecious sedge *Carex dioica*, marsh arrow-grass *Triglochin palustris* and cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix*. Of particular note is the presence of all three species of sundew: common sundew *Drosera rotundifolia*, oblong-leaved sundew *D. intermedia* and great sundew *D. anglica*. The edges of the mire are fringed by stands of common willow *Salix cinerea* and poor fen which is dominated by bottle sedge *Carex rostrata* with other species such as marsh pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, water mint *Mentha aquatica*, bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata* and marsh cinquefoil *Potentilla palustris*.

Highs Moss and Ustick Moss show a similar range of peatland communities to Nor Moss but with additional species such as water horsetail *Equisetum fluviatile*, floating scirpus *Eleogiton fluitans* and common spike-rush *Eleocharis palustris*. The other main area of mire is situated between Renny Craggs and Old Intake and is distinctly different in morphology. This occupies a narrow valley and has a central channel which drains southwards through a mosaic of bog pools and *Sphagnum* carpets. Oblong-leaved sundew is abundant around the edges of these

pools and on *Sphagnum* tussocks where lesser clubmoss *Selaginella selaginoides* has also been recorded.

The three main open tarns within the site, Hodson's Tarn, Three Dubs Tarn and Moss Eccles Tarn support a wide range of aquatic and wetland plants. These include four species of pondweed *Potamogeton alpinus*, *P. berchtoldii*, *P. natans* and *P. polygonifolius*, quill-wort *Isoetes lacustris*, lesser bladderwort *Utricularia minor*, floating bur-reed *Sparganium angustifolium* and small bur-reed *S. minimum* and lesser skullcap *Scutellaria minor*. Furthermore, these tarns have been the subject of detailed freshwater biological research by the Freshwater Biological Association.

The tarns and mires are also of particular importance as they support an outstanding dragonfly fauna. Twelve species have been recorded, including the nationally rare white-faced dragonfly *Leucorrhinia dubia*, the uncommon downy emerald *Cordulia aenea* and a variety of other species including the four-spotted chaser *Libellula quadrimaculata*, the golden-ringed dragonfly *Cordulegaster boltonii* and the brown hawker *Aeshna grandis*.