

COUNTY: BERKSHIRE

SITE NAME: HEATH LAKE

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

Local Planning Authorities: Wokingham District Council, Berkshire County Council

National Grid Reference: SU829652

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 175 **1:10,000:** SU86 NW

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1989 **Date of Last Revision:**

Area: 6.1 ha 15.1 ac

Other information: The site is designated as public open space under a management agreement with Wokingham District Council (Section 52 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971).

Description and Reasons for Notification

The site consists of a small, shallow lake, surrounded by birch and pine woodland with areas of relict heathland. Heath Lake is a long-established open water habitat supporting specialist communities of native plants and animals. Of particular interest are populations of some uncommon and rare aquatic plant species.

Heath Lake is situated on a sandy alluvial deposit overlying the Bracklesham Beds. The lake is stream and spring-fed and the water is slightly acid, influenced by the nutrient-poor substrate and surrounding soils. 'Acid lakes' are rare in lowland Britain, being a more typical feature of parts of Wales, northern England and Scotland. Heath Lake is the only example of an acid lake in Berkshire which still retains its characteristic flora.

The lake is generally less than 1 m deep, which allows for good penetration of light and ample growth of aquatic plants. Submerged species include alternate water-milfoil *Myriophyllum alterniflorum*, growing abundantly in dense masses, and the delicate six-stamened waterwort *Elatine hexandra*. This species, though widely distributed in Britain, occurs only very locally and is known to exist at present at only one other Berkshire site. Other species include floating club-rush *Eleogiton fluitans*, blunt-leaved and lesser pondweeds *Potamogeton obtusifolius* and *P. pusillus* and shoreweed *Littorella uniflora* which is abundant along the northern edge of the lake. This species is common in upland lakes, but only occurs very locally in lowland England.

The margins of the lake generally consist of low peaty banks with wet marshy areas in places along the water's edge. A diversity of plant species inhabits these areas, ranging from marginal aquatic and marsh species to plants typical of bogs and wet heaths. Marginal/marsh species include lesser spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*, marsh bedstraw *Galium palustre*, greater bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus uliginosus* and water mint *Mentha aquatica*, together with stands of soft rush *Juncus effusus* and yellow iris *Iris pseudacorus*. Damp peaty areas support sharp-flowered rush *Juncus acutiflorus*, bulbous rush *J. bulbosus*, star sedge *Carex echinata*, marsh pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris* and bog pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*. Purple moor grass *Molinia caerulea* is locally abundant, forming a wet heath community in association with cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix*. The margins of the lake also support populations of pillwort *Pilularia globulifera*, a type of fern with simple, linear leaves. This species is rare and declining in Britain, and is now mainly found in southern counties. Heath Lake is believed to be the only remaining site for pillwort in Berkshire.

Inflow and outflow streams also support a variety of aquatic and marsh plant species, including water horsetail *Equisetum fluviatile* and round-leaved water crowfoot *Ranunculus omiophyllus*.

Woodland surrounding the lake consists of birch and mature Scots pine with oak, rowan and crab apple also present. Guelder-rose and alder buckthorn occur around the lake edge where willows predominate. The uncommon purple willow *Salix purpurea* grows by the inlet at the eastern end of the lake.

The site also supports some small areas of dry heathland and acid grassland. Patches of heather *Calluna vulgaris* and bell heather *Erica cinerea* occur here, together with species of grasses and rushes. Associated with these areas are plants typical of acid grassland such as lesser skullcap *Scutellaria minor* and devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*.

The lake and its associated flora support a variety of aquatic insects and other animals. Dragonflies include *Aeshna grandis*, *Sympetrum striolatum* and *Orthetrum cancellatum*. A small island is used by some of the lake's breeding birds, which include great crested grebe.