

CITATION

Site name: DIBDEN BAY

County: HAMPSHIRE

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

Local Planning Authorities: Hampshire County Council, New Forest District Council

National Grid Reference: SU409094

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 196

1:10,000: SU40 NW, SU41 SW

Date notified (under 1981 Act): 27 September 2001

Date confirmed (under 1981 Act): 10 April 2002

Area: 229.25 ha

Reasons for notification

The site is notified for its nationally important assemblage of invertebrates (including beetles, bees, wasps and flies) and is one of the richest sites around the Solent for nationally-rare and nationally-scarce species. It is also notified for breeding lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, only two sites having more nesting pairs in south Hampshire, Isle of Wight and Poole Bay.

General description

With the exception of a small area known as Westcliff Marsh, the site was formed between the 1930s and 1973 by the deposition of marine dredgings over a complex of coastal habitats. This infilled area (often referred to as the Reclaim) was allowed to colonise naturally with plants, and now supports wet and dry grassland together with saltmarsh vegetation, salt pans, swamp, reedbed, scrub and open water. The land is poorly drained, and parts flood during the winter to form brackish temporary pools. Westcliff Marsh is a relict area of grazing marsh. The site as a whole includes stretches of two streams, the Marchwood Stream and the North Dibden Stream, which together form most of the landward boundary. Both the infilled area and Westcliff Marsh are grazed by cattle and ponies.

The predominant vegetation type is dominated by the grass creeping bent *Agrostis stolonifera*, often in a mosaic with patches of saltmarsh rush *Juncus gerardii*. The lowest lying areas of the site, including Westcliff Marsh, have areas of "salt pans" supporting a type of saltmarsh characterised by lesser sea-spurrey *Spergularia marina* and reflexed saltmarsh-grass *Puccinellia distans*.

The site supports an outstanding number of rare invertebrates, associated in particular with the saline wetlands present, but also with other wetland habitats and areas of dry grassland and open ground, including earth and gravel banks. Altogether a total of 21 nationally-rare species have been recorded, and a further 67 nationally-scarce species. Seven of these nationally-rare species, and 20 of the nationally-scarce ones, have not been recorded in southern Hampshire for at least 30 years. Of particular note are two very rare ground beetles,

Amara strenua and *Anisodactylus poeciloides*, the click beetle *Trixagus elateroides*, a snail-killing fly *Psacadina vittigera* and a plant bug *Stictopeurus abutilon* which before 1990 was thought to be extinct in Britain but is now known from three sites including this one. The bee and wasp fauna is also very rich, with nine species of bumble bee, including the very rare cuckoo bee *Nomada ferruginata*. This cuckoo bee and the two ground beetles *Amara strenua* and *Anisodactylus poeciloides*, together with the toadflax brocade moth *Calophasia lunula* and the bumble bee *Bombus humilis* are listed as priority species for conservation action within the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

The site is of importance for nesting lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, with about 30 pairs breeding in recent years. Other breeding birds include a few pairs of oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*, redshank *Tringa totanus* and Dartford warbler *Sylvia undata*, and many skylarks *Alauda arvensis* and reed warblers *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*.

During the winter numerous waterfowl (wildfowl and waders) use the site for feeding, particularly at night, especially wigeon *Anas penelope*, teal *Anas crecca*, pintail *Anas acuta* and mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*, as well as flocks of curlew *Numenius arquata* and lapwing. At peak times, the site attracts 18% of all the wigeon using the Solent (including Southampton Water), 5% of the pintail and 5% of the teal. Limited data also suggests that Dibden Bay is an important stop over for whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* on their spring migration northwards.

Five nationally-scarce plants have been recorded on the site: divided sedge *Carex divisa*, sea barley *Hordeum marinum*, annual beard-grass *Polypogon monspeliensis*, Borrer's saltmarsh-grass *Puccinella fasciculata* and stiff saltmarsh-grass *Puccinella rupestris*. Additionally the population of annual beard-grass *Polypogon monspeliensis* is believed to be the largest in Britain.

Other information:

The site is adjacent to the Hythe to Calshot Marshes SSSI, which forms part of the Solent and Southampton Water Special Protection Area (SPA) and Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention.