

COUNTY: SOMERSET

SITE NAME: MOORLINCH

DISTRICT: SEDGEMOOR

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

Local Planning Authority: SEDGEMOOR DISTRICT COUNCIL, Somerset County Council

National Grid Reference: ST 390360

Area: 226.0 (ha.) 558.4 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 182

1:10,000: ST 33 NE, ST 43 NW, ST 33 SE, ST 43 NW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): –

Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Description:

Moorlinch is part of the extensive grazing marsh grasslands and ditch systems of the Somerset Levels and Moors. Lying in the Parrett Basin at the foot of the Polden Hills, the area drains by gravity into the King's Sedgemoor Drain. Moorlinch consists largely of permanent grassland below 5m ODN. The soils are principally on the Altcar 1 series fen peats with Midelney series alluvial clay over the peat on the northern fringes.

The water table is high for most of the year with frequent winter flooding from high ground and surface water remaining on many fields throughout the winter and early spring. A wide variety of mesotrophic grassland types has developed, due mainly to variation in management practice. These include fescue/rye-grass swards dominated by Meadow Fescue *Festuca pratensis* and Perennial Rye-grass *Lolium perenne* together with Marsh Ragwort *Senecio aquaticus*, Ragged-Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi* and Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*. Some swards also contain Common Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, Crested Dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* and Meadow Rue *Thalictrum flavum*. The wetter fields often contain Marsh Foxtail *Alopecurus geniculatus*, Common Spike-rush *Eleocharis palustris* and Marsh-marigold *Caltha palustris*, together with rushes *Juncus* spp. There are some good examples of species-rich mire-type communities dominated by sedges *Carex* spp. together with Meadow Thistle *Cirsium dissectum*, Sweet Vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and small scattered populations of Southern Marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*.

Moorlinch contains a good proportion of botanically rich ditch systems. Regularly maintained field ditches are often species-rich and diverse. Notable species include Lesser Water-plantain *Baldellia ranunculoides*, Tubular Water-dropwort *Oenanthe fistulosa*, stoneworts *Chara* spp., Fan-leaved Water-crowfoot *Ranunculus circinatus* and Hairlike Pondweed *Potamogeton trichoides*. The larger IDB rhynes have a rich emergent flora which includes Water-plantain *Alisma plantago-aquatica* and Sea Club-rush *Scirpus maritimus*.

The channels and banksides support a rich fauna; rare species include the water beetle *Hydrophilus piceus* and the soldier fly *Odontomyia ornata*. Large populations of dragonflies and damselflies occur, including the Hairy Dragonfly *Brachytron pratense* and the Variable Coenagrion *Coenagrion pulchellum*.

The high water table on Moorlinch makes the area attractive to wintering wading birds and waterfowl. Large flocks of Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* and Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria* feed on the wet grasslands whilst winter floods attract herds of Bewick's Swan *Cygnus bewickii* and Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*. Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* and Teal *Anas crecca* are abundant throughout the winter.

Small numbers of Lapwing, Snipe, Curlew *Numenius arquata* and Redshank *Tringa totanus* breed in the moist tussocky meadows whilst strong populations of Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* and Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* breed on the fringes of the moor. Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* feed in the moist meadows on spring migration to their Icelandic breeding grounds.

Substantial numbers of Common Frog *Rana temporaria* breed in the northern part of the moor.