

COUNTY: BERKSHIRE

SITE NAME: DECOY PIT, POOLS AND WOOD

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

Local Planning Authorities: Berkshire County Council, Newbury District Council

National Grid Reference: SU612632

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 175 **1:10,000:** SU66 SW

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 2 April 1993 **Date of Last Revision:**

Area: 20.27 ha 50.08 ac

Description and Reasons for Notification

Decoy Pit, Pools and Woods comprises a mosaic of habitats including woodland, heathland, grassland and small waterbodies. The special interest of the site is twofold, firstly it supports the greatest known number of breeding dragonfly and damselfly species in Berkshire, and secondly it includes alder woodland types which are nationally uncommon and a declining habitat. The presence of other nationally uncommon species of insect and bird adds to the value of the SSSI.

The site lies on Bagshot Beds which in places overlain by Plateau Gravel. Soils of the Southampton Series are found in the southern part of the site where the land slopes gently within an eastward draining gully system. In the northern part of the site is a partially infilled gravel pit.

Since infilling ceased in the early 1980s, the former gravel pit surface has developed into a mosaic of shallow pools, a pond, heathland and scrub. The area supports many typical wetland plants with bulrush *Typha latifolia* and common spike-rush *Eleocharis palustris*, as well as locally scarce species including marsh speedwell *Veronica scutellata*. Drier areas are dominated by heather *Calluna vulgaris* and are being colonised by birch. Adjacent land, unaffected by mineral working, is dominated by secondary birch woodland with heathland and a small valley bog where purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* is abundant.

Ancient semi-natural woodland occurs in Brickkiln Gully, Roundwood Gully and Roundwood Copse. The low lying gullies are permanently waterlogged and support alder woodland, which is a habitat of nationally restricted distribution. The ground flora is typically diverse and includes greater tussock-sedge *Carex paniculata* and opposite-leaved golden-saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*. Similar, but non-ancient, woodland occurs in the eastern-most part of the site. Other more commonly occurring woodland types are represented within the SSSI, associated with the middle and upper slopes of the gullies. These areas contain species indicative of semi-natural ancient woodland including hard shield-fern *Polystichum aculeatum* and Solomon's-seal *Polygonatum multiflorum*. A well vegetated pond is located on the north side of Best Gully.

Twenty-three species of dragonfly and damselfly breed within the site, making it the richest known site for these insects in Berkshire. The ponds, streams and shallow pools are used for breeding whilst valuable feeding habitat is provided in the adjacent woodland. Three nationally scarce species are present: the scarce blue-tailed damselfly *Ischnura pumilio*, the downy emerald *Cordulia aenea* and the brilliant emerald *Somatochlora metallica*. This is the only known Berkshire locality for the scarce blue-tailed damselfly, a species known to prefer shallow, newly created pools.

The site is associated with a range of other fauna including nationally uncommon species such as woodlark and the silver-studded blue butterfly, both of which breed in the heathland area. Another nationally scarce species is the Devon carpet moth *Lampropteryx otregiata*, which is apparently restricted in Berkshire to this single colony. In winter snipe and jack snipe frequent the pools whilst siskins and redpolls are regularly recorded feeding in the alders.