

UNITARY AUTHORITY: NORTH SOMERSET

SITE NAME: GORDANO
VALLEY

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

Local Planning Authority: NORTH SOMERSET COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: ST 435730

Area: 161.68 (ha.) 399.52 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 172

1:10,000: ST 47 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1971

Date of Last Revision: 1972

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986

Date of Last Revision: 1990, 1998

Other Information:

A Nature Conservation Review Site. Site Boundary amended by extension at this revision.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

The Gordano Valley is an extensive low-lying and poorly drained peat moor situated between Carboniferous Limestone ridges. It supports a wide variety of the wet-meadow, reedbed and carr communities which were widespread on the levels and moors of Somerset. The valley is of botanical, ornithological, entomological and stratigraphic interest.

The grasslands support a variety of unimproved wet-meadow communities. These largely consist of variants of the nationally rare Blunt-flowered Rush–Marsh Thistle *Juncus subnodulosus*–*Cirsium palustre*, Soft/Sharp Flowered Rush–Marsh Bedstraw *Juncus effusus/acutiflorus*–*Galium palustre*, Purple Moorgrass–Meadow Thistle *Molinia caerulea*–*Cirsium dissectum* and Crested Dog's-tail–Common Knapweed *Cynosurus cristatus*–*Centaurea nigra* community types.

Over 130 species of flowering plant have so far been recorded including 3 species of orchids, 21 grasses and 14 sedges. Characteristic species include: Meadow Thistle *Cirsium dissectum*, Meadow Rue *Thalictrum flavum*, Ragged Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, Marsh Ragwort *Senecio aquaticus*, Devil's Bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis*, Sneezewort *Achillea ptarmica*, Marsh Marigold *Caltha palustris*, Lesser Spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*, Marsh Arrowgrass *Triglochin palustris*, Brookweed *Samolus valerandi*, and Marsh Orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*. The Gordano Valley is one of the few remaining localities in Britain for the nationally rare Brown Galingale *Cyperus fuscus*. This species is given special protection under Part 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 (as amended).

There is a small area of tall fen vegetation of the Common Reed–Hemp Agrimony *Phragmites australis*–*Eupatorium cannabinum* type. This is dominated by dense Common Reed, with scattered Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, Yellow Flag *Iris pseudacorus* and Valerian *Valeriana officinalis*.

The extensive system of rhyes and field ditches contains a rich flora which includes three nationally scarce species: Water Parsnip *Sium latafolium*, Whorled Water Milfoil *Myriophyllum verticillatum* and Fen Pondweed *Potamogeton coloratus*. Frogbit *Hydrocharis morsus-ranae*, Lesser Water Plantain *Baldellia ranunculoides* and Arrowhead *Sagittaria sagittifolia* also occur.

A small wood dominated by Hazel *Corylus avellana* exists along the southern boundary and the ground flora includes: Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*,

Primrose *Primula vulgaris*, Dog's Mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and Yellow Archangel *Lamium galeobdolon*.

The mosaic of habitats has resulted in a diverse invertebrate fauna. The communities associated with the rhynes and ditches are of a type now rarely found in Britain. Species recorded include two nationally rare soldier flies *Odontomyia ornata* and *Stratiomys potamida*, the nationally scarce Hairy Dragonfly *Brachytron pratense* and Variable Damselfly *Coenagrion pulchellum*.

The Gordano Valley is included in the British Trust for Ornithology register of ornithological sites. Of 106 bird species recorded, 73 are reported to breed including Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*, Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, Redshank *Tringa totanus*, Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia* and Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*.

The peat deposits of the Gordano Valley are of considerable stratigraphic interest. Cores extracted from Walton Moor provide evidence of the vegetational and climatic conditions that prevailed in this part of South West England from late Glacial times until the Romano British marine transgression.

SITE NOTIFIED TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE ON 6 NOVEMBER 1998