

COUNTY: CAMBRIDGESHIRE

SITE NAME: CHIPPENHAM FEN AND
SNAILWELL POOR'S FEN

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

Local Planning Authority: East Cambridgeshire District Council
Cambridgeshire County Council

National Grid Reference: TL 648697

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 154

1:10,000: TL 66 NE/NW

Date Notified (under 1949 Act): 1972

Date of last revision:

Date Notified (under 1981 Act): 1988

Date of last revision:

Area: NNR - 103.13 ha 254.83 ac

SSSI - 114.78 ha 283.62 ac

Other information: The National Nature Reserve was first declared in 1963 and has subsequently been extended to include most of the site. The site is included in a 'Nature Conservation Review' edited by Dr Ratcliffe, published by Cambridge University Press.

Description and Reasons for Notification

Chippenham Fen and Snailwell Poor's Fen is a site of national importance for its wide range of wetland habitats and associated birds and insects. Areas of tall and often rich fen, fen grassland and basic flush have developed over shallow peat soils. The site also contains calcareous grassland, neutral grassland, woodland, mixed scrub and open water. The flora is very diverse and includes a number of uncommon species, particularly in the damp meadows bordering the fen.

Large areas of tall fen dominated by a mosaic of saw sedge *Cladium mariscus*, and reed *Phragmites australis* are present with abundant purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*. A rich fen grassland has developed in mown areas, with blunt-flowered rush *Juncus subnodulosus*, long-stalked yellow sedge *Carex lepidocarpa*, glaucous sedge *C. flacca*, bog pimpernel *Anagallis tenella* and the nationally rare Cambridge milk parsley *Selinum carvifolia*. In one area this merges into a species-rich basic flush, where black bog rush *Schoenus nigricans* becomes abundant. Also present in this community are fragrant orchid *Gymnadenia conopsea* var. *densiflora*, marsh helleborine *Epipactis palustris* and marsh bedstraw *Galium palustre*. Other notable species within the fen include marsh lousewort *Pedicularis palustris*, grass of Parnassus *Parnassia palustris* and the locally rare common butterwort *Pinguicula vulgaris*, plus fen pondweed *Potamogeton coloratus* in wet hollows created by past peat cutting. Dense and invasive scattered scrub has developed and includes such species as guelder rose *Viburnum opulus*, bird cherry *Prunus padus* and alder buckthorn *Frangula alnus*. A fen grassland community dominated by purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* extends to the north of the main fen area. Grazed by cattle, these meadows contain a variety of orchids, including early marsh orchid *Dactylorhiza incarnata* var. *ochroleuca*, southern marsh orchid *D. praetermissa*, narrow-leaved marsh orchid *D. traunsterneri* and common spotted orchid *D. fuchsii*, marsh helleborine *Epipactis palustris*, squinancywort *Asperula cynanchica* and Cambridge milk parsley *Selinum carvifolia* which is locally abundant here, and several sedges.

Areas of chalk grassland lie to the north of the fen grassland and grade into it. Also cattle grazed, the sward contains common quaking-grass *Briza media*, red fescue *Festuca rubra*, meadow oat-grass *Avenula pratense* and an abundance of herb species including cowslip *Primula vulgaris*, restharrow *Ononis repens*, eyebright *Euphrasia officinalis* agg. and bee orchid *Ophrys apifera*. Columbine *Aquilegia vulgaris* occurs sparingly at the transition between this community and the fen grassland. Mown rides are present throughout the fen and woodland. They are dominated by coarse grasses, but also contain scattered primrose *Primula veris*, marsh valerian *Valeriana dioica* and common milkwort *Polygala vulgaris*. Meadows of damp neutral grassland adjacent to the fen grassland in the north-east were ploughed and fertilised during the last war. However, they have been cattle grazed since and are now developing a fen meadow flora.

The site is fed by two main chalk springs and several subsidiary ones. The water levels are controlled within a series of ditches and dykes which support a rich aquatic flora, including water plantain *Alsima plantago-aquatica*, mare's tail *Hippuris vulgaris* and frequent fen pondweed *Potamogeton coloratus*. Much of the woodland on the site was planted in the 1790's and contains a mixture of beech, oak, Scot's pine, ash, larch with downy birch and invasive sycamore. Alder car and willow have established in the wetter areas.

Because the fen contains such a wide range of habitats, it supports a great variety of breeding bird species, including hobby, short-eared owl, nightingale and several species of warbler. It also forms the winter roost for hen harrier. There are also invertebrate populations with many rare species of spiders and moths, including the rare

silver-barred moth *E. bankiana*.

Re-presentation of details approved by Council. Re-typed August 1999.