

COUNTY: BEDFORDSHIRE

SITE NAME: MARSTON THRIFT

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

Local Planning Authorities: Mid Bedfordshire District Council
Bedfordshire County Council

National Grid Reference: SP 973417

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 153 **1:10,000:** SP 94 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1951 **Date of Last Revision:** 1970

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1984 **Date of Last Revision:**

Area: 37.41 ha 92.44 ac

Other Information: Part of the site is leased and managed by the Bedfordshire and Huntingdon Naturalists' Trust.

Description and Reasons for Notification

Marston Thrift is an example of ash/maple woodland, characteristic of the heavy Oxford and Boulder Clays. It represents a habitat which has become increasingly scarce in Bedfordshire and over its natural range in lowland England.

The wood is characteristic of an ancient, semi-natural woodland, formerly managed as coppice-with-standards. The wood is benefiting from the re-establishment of this traditional form of management in some areas.

The tree canopy consists mainly of overgrown ash *Fraxinus excelsior* coppice with pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* over a shrub layer dominated by coppiced hazel *Corylus avellana* and a good variety of other species including field maple *Acer campestre*, blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, privet *Ligustrum vulgare*, crab apple *Malus sylvestris*, hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and midland hawthorn *Crataegus laevigata*.

The ground flora is characteristic of the dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*/bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* association, limited by shading in much of the wood but including species associated with ancient woodland sites such as yellow archangel *Lamiastrum galeobdolon*, wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, wood spurge *Euphorbia amygdaloides*, wood millet *Milium effusum* and wood melick *Melica uniflora*. An outlying population of Forster's woodrush *Luzula forsteri* occurs here at its only known station in Bedfordshire.

Additional habitats are provided by the rides which support damp grassland communities, often dominated by pendulous sedge *Carex pendula* in the wettest parts with other species including tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa*, false brome *Brachypodium sylvaticum*, rushes *Juncus spp.*, meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, greater bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus uliginosus* and common centaury *Centaureum erythraea*.

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Marston Thrift (Cont.....)

Marston Thrift is an important site in Bedfordshire for butterflies, including species that are locally uncommon eg. purple hairstreak *Quercusia quercus* and a national rarity at its only known site in the county.

The western meadow consists of a small valley whose steep sides support a similar short acidic grassland community with moss carpets. There is some variation and additional species including brown bent-grass *Agrostis canina*, harebell *Campanula rotundifolia* and the hawkweed *Hieracium sabaudum*. Another moss is also found, *Pseudoscleropodium purum* growing in areas of slightly longer more neutral grassland.

Scrub is scattered within the site and parts of the western valley slope have invasive bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* where the grassland is not cut for hay as elsewhere.