

COUNTY: GREATER LONDON SITE NAME: KESTON AND HAYES
COMMONS

BOROUGH: BROMLEY

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

Local Planning Authority: London Borough of Bromley

National Grid Reference: TQ 417643 Area: 49.7 (ha.) 122.8 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 177 1:10,000: TQ 46 SW and TQ 46 NW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1951 Date of Last Revision: 1975

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1987 Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

The boundary of this site has been revised by extensions and deletions. This site was formerly known as Keston Common.

Reasons for Notification:

Keston and Hayes Commons support examples of open Common Land habitats which have become scarce in Greater London. Of particular note are the areas of heathland and valley mire, and, in conjunction with the adjoining Ravensbourne Meadows, the gradation from dry acid grassland to wet neutral grassland. The special interest is derived from the close spatial association of these habitats and the manner in which their distribution reflects the underlying soil conditions.

The heathland and dry acid grassland communities occupy the higher ground on the dry, infertile, acid soils of the Blackheath Pebble Beds. The heathland is characterised by closed stands of heather *Calluna vulgaris*, and is also notable for the widespread occurrence of bell heather *Erica cinerea*, with bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* (in one of its only two London localities), and lesser amounts of dwarf gorse *Ulex minor*. These shrubs have all become rare in London owing to loss of habitat. The heather stand on Hayes Common is also unusual for London because it still harbours nine associated species of lichen (mainly *Cladonia* spp). These lichens are now uncommon in London being extremely sensitive to the effects of urban pollution.

The acid grasslands occur interspersed within the heather stands and in larger areas where the heather cover has been lost. Grasses including wavy hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa*, sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina* and heath grass *Sieglingia decumbens* are characteristic of the community, as are the herb species sheep's sorrel *Rumex acetosella* and tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, and heath rush *Juncus squarrosus*. Other species present which are locally restricted in London include bird's foot *Ornithopus perpusillus*, lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica* and pill sedge *Carex pilulifera*.

The pebble beds grade into more neutral, clayey soils on the lower slopes of the Ravensbourne Meadows. These support a neutral grassland community with sweet vernal grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and meadow foxtail *Alopecurus pratensis* dominant within a diverse sward. The rich herb component comprises over thirty species, the more frequent including field woodrush *Luzula campestris*, lesser stitchwort *Stellaria graminea*, and sorrel *Rumex acetosa*. Dyer's greenweed *Genista tinctoria*, an uncommon plant in the county, is also recorded.

The valley mire occurs along a seepage line where the two main soil types meet, and is a very rare habitat-type in Greater London. The mire is consequently of special note for

the presence of a number of county rarities. Of particular interest is the occurrence of several species of bog moss *Sphagnum* spp. and a number of other peatland mosses which carpet the peaty surface. Other species of particular interest include cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix*, marsh pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, green-ribbed sedge *Carex binervis*, star sedge *C. echinata*, and common cotton-grass *Eriophorum angustifolium*. A strong population of bog asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum* is also found here in its only London locality.

Water draining from the mire becomes slightly enriched as it traverses Ravensbourne Meadows, and in conjunction with more localised seepages produces an area of wet neutral grassland. This is rich in species that are typical of the habitat but which are uncommon in London. Amongst these are sneezewort *Achillea ptarmica*, betony *Stachys officinalis*, ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, greater spearwort *Ranunculus lingua* and a particular abundance of marsh marigold *Caltha palustris*.

Of additional interest for their flora and invertebrate fauna, are the wet alder *Alnus glutinosa* woods and shallow ponds found along the course of the Ravensbourne brook at the bottom of the valley.