

COUNTY: SURREY

SITE NAME: BOOKHAM COMMONS

DISTRICT: MOLE VALLEY

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

Local Planning Authority: MOLE VALLEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

National Grid Ref: TQ 128 565

Area: 151.4 (ha) 374.1 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheets 1:50,000: 187

1:10,000: TQ 15 NW

Date notified (under 1949 Act): 1961

Date of last revision: 1975

Date notified (under 1981 Act): 1985

Date of last revision: -

Other Information: This site is owned by the National Trust.

Reasons for Notification

This site, on the variably drained and undulating terrain of the London Clay, supports a range of habitat types including woodland, scrub, grassland and open water. The diversity of habitats promotes an extremely rich community of breeding birds and important invertebrate populations. Detailed invertebrate recording has taken place for over forty years by the London Natural History Society and this is regarded as one of the best recorded clay sites in Britain.

Woodland covers approximately two-thirds of the site. The majority of this woodland is mature and dominated by pedunculate oak *Quercus robur*, although other species occurring include turkey oak *Quercus cerris*, down birch *Betula pubescens*, field maple *Acer campestre*, beech *Fagus sylvatica*, holly *Ilex aquifolium* and hazel *Corylus avellana*. The field layer of these mature woods includes bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, wood-sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*, bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* and a scarce plant in Surrey, thin-spiked wood sedge *Carex strigosa*; the bryophyte (moss and liverwort) flora is rich and includes one of only two Surrey localities for the moss *Zygodon conoideus*. These mature woodlands are dissected by a network of rides which support a diverse flora including bugle *Ajuga reptans*, common spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* and water mint *Mentha aquatica*. The divide between Great and Little Bookham Common is marked by woodland of more recent origin, silver birch *Betula pendula* and pedunculate oak dominate this type but ash *Fraxinus excelsior* is present along the railway embankment (TQ 127556). Breeding birds which are associated with woodland at this site include hawfinch, woodcock, tree-creeper and the three British woodpeckers.

Little Bookham Common is a mosaic of rough grassland and scrub; much of this common is poorly drained and there are several old gunpits and bomb craters. The areas of open grassland are dominated by tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa*, with cocksfoot *Dactylis glomerata* and rushes *Juncus* species; notable plants which occur include southern marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*, pepper saxifrage *Silaum silaus*, spiked sedge *Carex spicata* and adder's-tongue fern *Ophioglossum vulgatum*. Scrub is scattered throughout

the grassland but also forms dense belts over much of Little Bookham Common; hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* dominates much of this scrub but a diversity of other species occurs including blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, grey willow *Salix cinerea*, aspen *Populus tremula* and two species of rose which are scarce in Surrey, *Rosa micrantha* and *Rosa stylosa*. The grassland and scrub areas support breeding nightingale, lesser whitethroat, yellow-hammer and grasshopper warbler.

Open water habitats contribute significantly to the interest of the site and are represented by several woodland ponds and by a tributary stream of the River Mole. The open water flora of these areas includes three plants which are scarce in Surrey: greater duckweed *Lemna polyrhiza*, fat duckweed *Lemna gibba* and threat-leaved water-crowfoot *Ranunculus trichophyllus*. Stands of tall fen vegetation are particularly well-established in the chain of ponds which run east from the Isle of Wight (TQ 126562); great reedmace *Typha latifolia* dominates much of this fen but also present are yellow iris *Iris pseudacorus*, trifold bur-marigold *Bidens tripartita*, rushes *Juncus* species and two plants which are rare in Surrey, orange fox-tail grass *Alopecurus aequalis* and eared willow *Salix aurita*. Breeding birds associated with the areas of fen and open water include little grebe, mute swan, coot, reed bunting and moorhen.

Since invertebrate recording began at this site many different species of insects have been recorded, including 611 species of beetles, 1140 species of flies, 146 bugs, 201 spiders, 17 dragonflies and over 300 species of butterflies and moths; for the groups cited these figures represent, on average, between one-third and one-quarter of the British species list. The diversity of habitats is responsible for this large number of species. Dead oak trees provide the habitat for several beetles which are scarce in Surrey including *Nemadus colonoides* and *Aridius nodifer* whilst the fen and open water is important for dragonflies such as the brown aeshna *Aeshna grandis*. The site is particularly important for its lepidoptera (butterflies and moths) which frequent the wooded rides and the areas of grassland and scrub. Two moths which occur, the toadflax brocade *Calophasia lunula* and the broad-bordered bee hawk *Hemaris fuciformis*, are nationally rare while this is the best known Surrey site for the purple emperor butterfly *Apatura iris*. Other butterflies which are present include white-letter hairstreak *Strymonidia w-album*, white admiral *Limenitis camilla* and purple hairstreak *Quercusia quercus*.