

COUNTY: EAST SUSSEX

SITE NAME: MILTON GATE MARSH

DISTRICT: WEALDEN

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

Local Planning Authority: WEALDEN DISTRICT COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: TQ 541 058

Area: 18.6ha (45.9 acres)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 199

1:10,000: TQ 50NW

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1991

Other Information: This site lies within the Low Weald Natural Area.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

The site consists of two wetland depressions forming a valley fen on alluvial soils created by the River Cuckmere and one of its tributaries. Agriculturally unimproved and marshy grasslands dominated by rushes and sedges make up much of these depressions, but there are also areas of reed bed, sallow carr and open water. This mosaic of habitats supports a rich assemblage of invertebrates including one proposed Red Data Book+ species, and numerous nationally rare* and scarce** species. The site is also of local importance for the breeding bird community it supports.

On much of the central wet area marshy acidic grassland occurs, dominated by tussocks of tufted hair-grass, *Deschampsia cespitosa*, Yorkshire fog grass, *Holcus lanatus* and various rushes *Juncus spp.* A number of spongy hummocks are dominated by jointed rush *Juncus articulatus* and pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris* and a small spring is surrounded by rushes, wild angelica *Angelica sylvestris*, great hairy willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum* and great pond-sedge *Carex riparia*. Of particular interest is a colony of the dark-flowered form of the southern marsh orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* growing in association with the heath spotted orchid *D. maculata*. An ungrazed area contains additional species such as meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, sedges *Carex spp.* and fleabane *Pulicaria dysenterica*, forming part of a diverse sward.

The tall fen vegetation present in part of the central marshy area is dominated by reed *Phragmites australis*, with mixed tall herbs, and merges into sallow scrub at the eastern end of the site. Two small ponds, subject to summer drying, are present and the running water of the Cuckmere supports a well-developed marginal flora dominated by reeds and reed sweet-grass *Glyceria maxima*.

Included within the central area are some patches of drier neutral grassland dominated by cock's-foot grass *Dactylis glomerata* and Yorkshire fog, adding to the site's range of habitat types. Between the central wet area and the railway line lie heavily grazed fields of neutral semi-improved grassland dominated by crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina* and cock's-foot; their interest is that they form an integral part of the hydrological system supporting the more diverse communities elsewhere in the site.

The varied vegetation of the site supports a rich assemblage of invertebrate species with a high degree

of habitat fidelity towards rich marshland. The rare hoverfly *Cheilosia chrysocoma* (provisional RDB3+) and seventeen nationally scarce species have been found here including the beetles *Ochthebius exaratus* and *Stenolophus skrimshiranus*, the latter being found living in muddy vegetated soils close to water margins, and moths: the sallow clearwing *Syanthodon flaviventris* and the red-tipped clearwing *S.formicaeformis*. The metallic green beet carrion beetle *Aclypea opaca* is found here in its only known Sussex location, as well as the Sussex rarity the marshland form of the five spot burnet moth *Zygaena trifolii ssp. decreta*.

The site supports a number of breeding birds of local importance to Sussex, including reed warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*, sedge warbler *A. schoenobaenus*, and water rail *Rallus aquaticus*. Another very rare wetland bird has bred sporadically in recent years.

NOTE

- * Nationally Rare: Occurs in 1-15 of 10 x 10km squares in Britain
- ** Nationally Scarce: Occurs in 16-100 of 10 x 10km squares in Britain
- + RDB: Nationally rare species are listed in the relevant Red Data Book (RDB), two of which have been published: "British Red Data Book 1: Vascular Plants" and "British Red Data Book 2: Insects". The three RDB categories: Rare, Vulnerable and Endangered indicate increasing degrees of threat of extinction in Britain.