

COUNTRY: GLOUCESTERSHIRE

SITE NAME: COOMBE HILL CANAL

DISTRICT: TEWKESBURY

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

Local Planning Authority: GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL, Tewkesbury Borough Council

National Grid Reference: SO 870269

Area: 20.16 (ha.) 49.80 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 162

1:10,000: SO 82 NW, NE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1954

Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 10 February 1995

Other Information:

Site boundary alteration (deletions).

Description and Reasons for Notification:

This site is of special interest for its assemblages of nationally rare and scarce invertebrates and nationally scarce plants. It is one of the most important known wetland sites for these features within Gloucestershire.

Coombe Hill Canal is situated in a low lying area of the River Severn flood plain a few miles south of Tewkesbury. It consists of a 3.7 kilometre stretch of disused, partly overgrown canal flanked by ditches, neutral grassland, scattered scrub and trees, an area of inundation fen fringed by willows and a withy bed. The whole area is subject to extensive winter flooding.

The invertebrate interest centres on the beetle (Coleoptera) fauna. Many of the species, such as the rare click beetle *Selatosomus nigricornis* and the scarce ground beetles *Agonum scitulum* and *Bembidion clarki*, are dependent on the wetland vegetation along the canal margins and areas of fen and carr. Beetles associated with deadwood are also present including the rare longhorn beetle *Grammoptera ustulata* and the scarce beetles *Anaglyptus mysticus* and *Ischnomera cyanea*. The adults feed on hawthorn blossom and umbellifers which are plentiful along the canal. Several of the rare and uncommon beetle species recorded from Coombe Hill Canal are not recorded from elsewhere within Gloucestershire.

Flies (Diptera) are also well represented including species such as the rare *Rhamphomyia physoprocta* and *Scathophaga tinctinervis* which appear to require areas with fluctuating water levels for their survival. Neither of these species has been recorded from any other site in the county.

The site supports a diverse fauna from other invertebrate groups, namely dragonflies, snails, spiders, butterflies and moths. Many of these are of local importance and there are

two nationally scarce moths, silver cloud *Egira conspicillaris* and ruddy highflyer *Hydromena ruberata*.

Several nationally scarce plants, such as golden dock *Rumex maritimus*, corky-fruited water-dropwort *Oenanthe pimpinelloides*, the parasitic greater dodder *Cuscuta europaea* and true fox-sedge *Carex vulpina* grow along the margins of the canal and ditches. The latter species is a threatened and declining species and Coombe Hill Canal is believed to be the sole remaining site for this species in Gloucestershire. Hair-like pondweed *Potamogeton trichoides* occurs in the open water at the eastern end of the canal. Species of local importance include small-flowered winter cress *Barbarea stricta* and meadow rue *Thalictrum flavum*.

The site is also locally important for its diverse breeding bird assemblage, particularly resident and migrant warblers which make use of the scrub and withy bed habitats and waders such as curlew *Numenius arquata* and snipe *Gallinago gallinago* which frequent the wetter areas of the fen and ditch margins.