

COUNTY: WARWICKSHIRE

SITE NAME: OXHOUSE FARM

DISTRICT: Stratford-on-Avon

SITE REF: 15WFL

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

Local Planning Authority: WARWICKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL, Stratford-on-Avon District Council

National Grid Reference: SP 300509 Area: 17.4 (ha.) 43 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 151 1:10,000: SP 25 SE, SP 35 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1973 Date of Last Revision: 1973

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986 Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Boundary alteration (extension).

Part of the site managed by the Warwickshire Nature Conservation Trust as a nature reserve.

Formerly known as Oxhouse Disused Railway and Meadow.

Reasons for Notification:

Oxhouse Farm lies in the valley of the River Dene in south Warwickshire. The site comprises three herb rich meadows and the adjacent railway line which was abandoned in 1966. It lies on beds of shales, mudstones and limestones of the Upper Rhaetic which have given rise to alkaline soils favouring a limestone flora.

The grassland is characterised by upright brome *Bromus erectus* and tor-grass *Brachypodium pinnatum* which are found together with typical calcicolous species such as quaking-grass *Briza media* and glaucous sedge *Carex flacca*. The banks of the railway line with their shallow soils are species rich with locally abundant salad burnet *Sanguisorba minor*, cowslips *Primula veris*, and wild basil *Clinopodium vulgare*. Noteworthy species are yellow-wort *Blackstonia perfoliata*, spiny restharrow *Ononis spinosa*, small scabious *Scabiosa columbaria* and strawberry clover *Trifolium fragiferum* with colonies of dyer's greenweed *Genista tinctoria* and the scarce fine-leaved vetch *Vicia tenuifolia*. Along the trackway thirty-seven species of grass have been recorded including large colonies of rat's-tail fescue *Vulpia myuros* and fern grass *Desmazeria rigida*. A species rich shrub layer lines each side of the track with hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, and traveller's joy *Clematis vitalba* occurring commonly and also wild privet *Ligustrum vulgare*, dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*, wayfaring tree *Viburnum lantana* and willows *Salix cinerea* and *S. aurita*.

The eastern grazed field is species rich with abundant knapweed *Centaurea nigra* and *C. scabiosa*, woolly thistle *Cirsium eriophorum* and devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*. The western field is old ridge and furrow with lady's bedstraw *Galium verum*, agrimony *Agrimonia eupatoria*, knapweeds and wild carrot *Daucus carota* on the dry ridges and damp-loving species in the furrows. The central field is not as species-rich as the others but includes typical communities of cowslips, dropwort *Filipendula vulgaris*, spiny restharrow, and woolly thistle. All three fields are surrounded by wide hedgerows with numerous cliff shrubs. At their lower ends is the alluvial floodplain of the River Dene. The meadows this supports all slope gently down to the communities of meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, and meadow cranesbill *Geranium pratense* as well as scattered scrub.

The mosaic of grassland, scrub and hedgerow has provided an important habitat for invertebrates particularly butterflies. Twenty-six species are regularly present, amongst

them marbled white, dark green fritillary, brown argus and white-letter hairstreak. The meadows are also covered by numerous ant hills.

Another notable feature of Oxhouse Farm is the farmland bird community with many warblers breeding in hedgerows and along the railway line and regular breeding records of nightingale, all three woodpeckers, and several birds of prey including sparrowhawk and kestrel.