

COUNTY: GREATER LONDON

SITE NAME: WALTHAMSTOW MARSHES

BOROUGH: WALTHAM FOREST

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

Local Planning Authority: Waltham Forest

National Grid Reference: TQ 352875

Area: 36.7 (ha.) approx 90.7 (ac.) approx

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 177

1:10,000: TQ 38 NW & TQ 38 NE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act):

Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

New site: adjoins Walthamstow Reservoirs SSSI.

Reasons for Notification:

Walthamstow Marshes are one of the last remaining examples of semi-natural wetland in Greater London. They contain a variety of plant communities typical of a former flood plain location, such as a range of neutral grassland types, sedge marsh, reed swamp, sallow scrub and areas of tall herb vegetation. Associated with this diversity of habitat are several species of plant and insect which are uncommon in the London area.

Traditionally, Walthamstow Marshes were managed as 'Lammas Land': they were shut up for hay from early April to mid August and then opened up for grazing by commoners' horses and cattle. With the decline of this traditional management earlier this century it seems likely that the taller more aggressive plants were favoured. Although there are several areas of tall herb, tall grass or tall fen communities, shorter plants continue to survive. One of the more interesting species is adder's tongue fern *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, and its presence is considered to be indicative of the ancient origin of the grassland communities.

The areas of relatively dry grassland are dominated by a variety of common grasses, with bents *Agrostis* species and clovers *Trifolium* species co-dominating in the shortest, driest turfs. Herbs associated with this community include burnet saxifrage *Pimpinella saxifraga*, bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* and common agrimony *Agrimonia eupatoria*. The wetter areas of grassland are often characterised by single species stands of reed grass *Phalaris arundinacea*, tufted hair grass *Deschampsia cespitosa*, brown sedge *Carex disticha*, and great hairy willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum* or clumps of comfrey *Symphytum* species or michaelmas daisy *Aster* species. Adder's tongue fern is scattered throughout this community, and also present are ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, square-stemmed St John's wort *Hypericum tetrapterum* and meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*. The latter species is common over much of the marsh and forms dense stands in a number of places.

In the lower lying areas sedges are common and the hybrid 'graceful' sedge *Carex x subgracilis* forms some of the most extensive stands. In total 7 species of sedge and one hybrid are present on the marshes. Reed *Phragmites australis* tends to dominate the wettest parts of the site and is generally present as single species stands. Sedges, reed grasses, and reedmace *Typha latifolia* are well represented in the network of ditches: several of these species are present together with other bankside plants along the Coppermill stream. The main ditch of the 'Triangle' also contains a good variety of wetland plants such as water dropwort *Oenanthe fistulosa*, water plantains *Alisma*

species, water whorl-grass *Catabrosa aquatica*, gypsywort *Lycopus europaeus* and marsh bedstraw *Galium palustre*.

The marshes contain several species of insect with a restricted distribution in the London area such as the Essex skipper butterfly *Thymelicus lineola*, an uncommon hoverfly *Volucella inanis* and a pyralid moth *Shoeribus micronellus*. This latter species is a marshland species and its presence together with that of Roesel's bush cricket *Metrioptera roeselii* are indicative of the likely antiquity of the marshland habitat. The insect fauna includes other moths as well as flies and a bug of local distribution.

The breeding bird community contains several species typically associated with marshland habitats such as reed bunting, reed, sedge and willow warblers. A variety of wintering birds visit the marshes and neighbouring reservoirs while in autumn flocks of finches are to be found feeding on the seeds of the tall herbs.