

COUNTY: CHESHIRE

SITE NAME: SANDBACH FLASHES

DISTRICT: CONGLETON/CREWE & NANTWICH      SITE REF: 15WCF

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

Local Planning Authority: CHESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL, Congleton Borough Council, Crewe & Nantwich Borough Council

National Grid Reference: SJ 725594      Area: 152.9 (ha.) 377.8 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 118      1:10,000: SJ 75 NW, SJ 76 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1963      Date of Last Revision: 1979

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986      Date of Last Revision: 1987

#### Other Information:

Part of the site is managed by the Sandbach Flashes Joint Management Committee. Site boundary alteration (extension & reduction).

#### Description and Reasons for Notification:

Sandbach Flashes is a site of physiographical and biological importance. It consists of a series of pools formed as a result of subsidence due to the solution of underlying salt deposits. The water varies from freshwater, chemically similar to other Cheshire meres, to highly saline. Inland saline habitats are extremely rare and are of considerable interest because of the unusual associations of plants and animals.

Most of the flashes are surrounded by semi-improved or improved grassland. Fodens Flash is partly surrounded by an important area of wet woodland.

#### Biology

Due to the differing age, depth and water chemistry the flashes show considerable variation in their plant and animal communities. Generally the most recently formed have narrow disjunct stands of emergent vegetation dominated by great reedmace *Typha latifolia* and occasionally by lesser pond sedge *Carex acutiformis*, whilst the oldest have extensive stands of common reed *Phragmites australis*. At Fodens Flash the emergent vegetation grades into fen and wet woodland dominated by alder *Alnus glutinosa* and willow *Salix* spp. Wood small-reed *Calamagrostis epigejos* is locally dominant in the ground flora and the woodland also has an exceptional lichen flora for Cheshire.

In some areas periodic flooding occurs and species such as water pepper *Polygonum hydropiper*, plicate sweetgrass *Glyceria plicata* and celery-leaved water-crowfoot *Ranunculus sceleratus* occur. Shore-weed *Littorella uniflora*, a rare plant in Cheshire, is also present.

A number of uncommon aquatic invertebrates occur including a mayfly *Caenis robusta* and a snail *Gyraulis laevis*.

The more saline flashes are fed by natural brine springs and contain a range of species tolerant of brackish water, for example, spiked water-milfoil *Myriophyllum spicatum*, fennel-leaved pondweed *Potamogeton pectinatus* and horned pondweed *Zannichellia palustris*. Of particular interest is *Enteromorpha intestinalis* which is often associated with saline conditions. Adjacent to these saline flashes are areas of saltmarsh vegetation containing species such as sea aster *Aster tripolium*, lesser sea spurrey *Spergularia marina* and reflexed saltmarsh grass *Puccinellia distans*. A number of notable brackish water invertebrates occur including the water boatmen *Sigara concinna* and *S. stagnalis* and the shrimps *Gammarus duebeni* and *G. tigrinus*.

Several of the flashes are important for breeding birds and also support large numbers of wildfowl and waders as migrants and winter residents. Wigeon *Anas penelope* (200), teal *Anas crecca* (500), lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* (500), snipe *Gallinago gallinago* (200) and curlew *Numenius arquata* (50) are regularly recorded.

### Geology

The Moston Flash area consists of two parallel, elongated hollows which were formed by the removal in solution of underlying salt deposits and resultant collapse of glacial deposits above. These features were initially formed naturally but brine extraction for salt production has accelerated their development, which continues up to the present day. The site provides an excellent illustration of the active linear subsidence features which are characteristic of the Cheshire Plain.