

COUNTY: SOMERSET

SITE NAME: KING'S SEDGEMOOR

DISTRICT: SEDGEMOOR AND SOUTH SOMERSET

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

Local Planning Authority: SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL, Sedgemoor District Council, South Somerset District Council

National Grid Reference: ST 400330      Area: 822 (ha.) 2032 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 182      1:10,000: ST 33 NE, ST 43 SW, ST 33 SE

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985      Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

New site.

Description:

King's Sedgemoor is part of the extensive grazing marsh grasslands and ditch systems of the Somerset Levels and Moors. The site is at the centre of the larger Altcar series peat basin of King's Sedgemoor; lying between the Sowey River to the west, Cradle Bridge to the east and extending to the south over Beer Wall into part of Aller Moor.

A wide variety of neutral grasslands has developed, due mainly to variation in management practice. These include Fescue/Rye-grass swards dominated by Meadow Fescue *Festuca pratensis* and Perennial Rye-grass *Lolium perenne*, with Crested Dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, Creeping Bent *Agrostis stolonifera*, Common Bent *Agrostis capillaris* and Tufted Hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa* often present in the sward.

Wetter fields contain Soft Rush *Juncus effusus* and Sweet-grasses *Glyceria* spp. together with Tall Fescue *Festuca arundinacea*, Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria* and Marsh Ragwort *Senecio aquaticus*. Such swards often contain a variety of sedges including Hairy Sedge *Carex hirta*, Greater Pond-sedge *C. riparia*, Brown Sedge *C. disticha* and Carnation Sedge *C. panicea* together with Ragged-Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, Common Spike-rush *Eleocharis palustris*, Jointed Rush *Juncus articulatus* and Pepper Saxifrage *Silaum silaus*.

A few exceptionally herb-rich swards have survived on the southern and western fringes of the site. These are often 'sedgely' fields, some containing the Carnation Sedge/Meadow Thistle *Cirsium dissectum* mire-type community.

The King's Sedgemoor Drain is the main drainage channel for a wide area and has a eutrophic deep-water flora typified by Yellow Water-lily *Nuphar lutea*. IDB rhynes are generally maintained on an annual cycle, giving a flora dominated by Rigid Hornwort *Ceratophyllum demersum*; whereas many of the field ditches are less frequently cleaned and are dominated by dense stands of Reed Sweet-grass *Glyceria maxima* and Sea Club-rush *Scirpus maritimus*. More regularly maintained field ditches may support a diverse flora including Frogbit *Hydrocharis morsus-ranae*, Least Duckweed *Wolffia arrhiza*, Greater Duckweed *Lemna polyrrhiza*, Greater Bladderwort *Utricularia vulgaris*, Stoneworts *Chara* spp. and occasionally Flowering Rush *Butomus umbellatus*.

Ditch banks are often herb-rich with Marsh Arrowgrass *Triglochin palustris*, Brookweed *Samolus valerandi*, Meadow Rue *Thalictrum flavum* and Marsh Stitchwort *Stellaria palustris*.

The small field ditches and banksides have a rich invertebrate community including the rare soldier flies *Odontomyia ornata* and *Stratiomys furcata*, the hover fly *Lejops vittata* and the water beetle *Hydrophilus piceus*. A further 5 notable species of water beetle have been recorded.

A high water table with shallow standing water on some fields and abundant soil invertebrates makes the area attractive to wintering birds. Large flocks of Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* together with Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria* and Dunlin *Calidris alpina* feed throughout the site, with smaller numbers of Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, Redshank *Tringa totanus*, Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* and Jack Snipe *Lymnocyptes minimus* often present. In late winter the moor is visited by waterfowl, with large flocks of Teal *Anas crecca* and Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*. Herds of Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* feed during the winter together with smaller numbers of Bewick's Swan *Cygnus bewickii*. King's Sedgemoor is consistently the most important feeding area in the Somerset Moors for Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* on passage in spring, and occasionally, autumn.

The site is of outstanding importance for breeding waders, holding the highest concentration of nesting Redshank on the Somerset Moors. Substantial numbers of Curlew *Numenius arquata*, Snipe and Lapwing also breed on the fields which remain moist into early summer. The area also contains breeding Mute Swan and Mallard with good breeding populations of Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* and Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* alongside the larger ditches.

King's Sedgemoor Drain is known to be an important river corridor for Otters *Lutra lutra*.