

Site Notified to the Secretary of State on 17 December 1985. Revised on 7 July 1989.

County: Somerset **Site Name:** Westhay Moor

District: Mendip and Sedgemoor

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

Local Planning Authority: Mendip District Council, Sedgemoor District Council, Somerset County Council

National Grid Reference: ST 455445 **Area:** 513.66 (ha) 1269.25 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 182 1:10,000: ST 44 NE, ST 44 NW, ST 44 SE, ST 44 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1971

Date of Last Revision:

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985

Date of Last Revision: 1989

Other Information:

Major part of the site is new SSSI but includes Westhay SSSI (notified under 1949 Act: 1971), most of which is managed as a Nature Reserve by the Somerset Trust for Nature Conservation.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Westhay Moor forms part of the nationally important grazing marsh and ditch systems of the Somerset Levels and Moors. The land lies below 5m ODN in the basin of the River Brue at the foot of the Liss Limestone slopes of the Wedmore Ridge. The soils are principally of the Turbary series acid peats modified in parts by cutting. Altcar series reed peat occurs on the fringes of the site.

Over much of the moor, the water table is high throughout the year with extensive winter flooding occurring regularly. Water tables in the peat excavations are artificially lowered during active working, but excavations often fill with water for much of the year.

The moor is a former raised bog, now for the most part modified to grassland by agricultural practice. A wide range of sward types has developed due to variation in soils and in management practice. Unimproved swards are well represented with many examples of the now nationally rare and threatened species-rich mire-type meadows characterised by meadow thistle *Cirsium dissectum*, carnation sedge *Carex panicea*, marsh pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris* and devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*. Wetter swards contain ragged-Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, common spike-rush *Eleocharis palustris*, marsh-marigold *Caltha palustris*, greater bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus uliginosus* and rushes *Juncus* spp. Semi-improved swards include a good diversity of grasses, often with components of the mire-type community present. Most swards contain a variety of sedges including hammer sedge *Carex*

hirta and brown sedge *C. disticha*; together with typical wet grassland species such as meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria* and marsh ragwort *Senecio aquaticus*.

An area of birch *Betula* spp and willow *Salix* spp carr woodland, with purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, bog myrtle *Myrica gale* and relict areas of the formerly extensive raised bog with *Sphagnum* spp, lies in the centre of the peat excavations in the southern part of the moor. This area contains bog plants with restricted distributions in southern England, including hare's-tail cottongrass *Eriophorum vaginatum* and royal fern *Osmunda regalis*.

136 aquatic and bankside vascular plant species have been recorded from the field ditches, IDB-maintained rhynes, arterial watercourses and abandoned peat workings. The diverse emergent and bankside flora, dominated by reed sweet-grass *Glyceria maxima* in overgrown channels and by bulrush *Typha latifolia* in abandoned peat excavations, includes nodding bur-marigold *Bidens cernua*, fine-leaved water-dropwort *Oenanthe aquatica*, water dock *Rumex hydrolapathum*, marsh dock *R. palustris*, flowering rush *Butomus umbellatus*, narrow-leaved water-plantain *Alisma lanceolatum* and marsh stitchwort *Stellaria palustris*. The ditches and rhynes contain a good range of submerged species; notably water-violet *Hottonia palustris*, greater bladderwort *Utricularia vulgaris* and hairlike pondweed *Potamogeton trichoides*. Floating species include frogbit *Hydrocharis morsus-ranae*, rootless duckweed *Wolffia arrhiza* and great duckweed *Lemna polyrrhiza*.

Westhay Moor supports a nationally outstanding community of terrestrial and aquatic invertebrates. Thirteen Red Data Book species have been recorded in recent years including the endangered lesser silver diving beetle, *Hydrochara caraboides*, which preys on the rich molluscan fauna in the peaty ditches. It is now confined nationally to the peat moors in the Brue Basin. The large soldier fly, *Odontomyia ornata* and the rare marsh fly, *Pteromicra leucopez*a are also found on Westhay Moor. At least 28 nationally notable invertebrate species also occur on the moor.

Other habitats present include hedges and hedgerow trees of alder *Alnus glutinosa*, willow, hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and birch which together with the meadows provide valuable resting and feeding areas for the invertebrates. The meadows, ditches, abandoned peat workings and hedgerows provide suitable breeding habitats for a diverse and nationally important breeding bird community. At least 39 species breed on the moor including lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, redshank *Tringa totanus* and yellow wagtail *Motacilla flava* on the meadows and nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* and Little Owl *Athene noctus* in the scrub woodland. Flooded peat workings attract wintering and breeding waterfowl including little grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* and water rail *Rallus aquaticus*.

Other vertebrate species present include the otter *Lutra lutra*, grass snake *Natrix natrix* and common frog *Rana temporaria*.