

COUNTY: GREATER LONDON

SITE NAME: BRENT RESERVOIR

BOROUGH: BARNET; BRENT

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

Local Planning Authority: Barnet; Brent

National Grid Reference: TQ 217873

Area: 68.6 (ha. approx) 169.6 (ac. approx)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 176

1:10,000: TQ 28 NW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1950

Date of Last Revision: 1975

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985

Date of Last Revision: 1986

Other Information:

There are several minor boundary amendments from the former SSSI, including extensions.

Description:

The Brent Reservoir is of interest primarily for breeding wetland birds and in particular for significant numbers of nesting great crested grebe. The diversity of wintering waterfowl and the variety of plant species growing along the water margin are also of special note for Greater London.

The reservoir, formed in 1835 by damming the valley of the River Brent below the confluence of its two constituent tributaries, is among the oldest of London's many large artificial lakes. It is unusual in being characterised by naturally sloping earth banks and a shallow depth, features which have encouraged the development of a rich mixture of wetland and waterside habitats.

Along much of the shoreline there is a fringe of fenland plants and several of the species have a restricted distribution in Greater London, the more notable include common spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* and greater spearwort *Ranunculus lingua*. Toward the head of the northern and eastern areas where, respectively, the Silk Stream and Dollis Brook enter the reservoir, wetland plant communities are more extensive, in places covering large areas of inwashed silt deposits. Here there are varied gradations from open water, through swamp and mixed species fen to willow carr, with damp willow woodland occupying the higher ground. The juxtaposition and expanse of these habitats is of particular value in attracting a noteworthy variety of breeding wetland birds.

Breeding birds of the swamp, fen and willow carr include reed and sedge warblers, reed bunting, redpoll and willow tit. The more secluded areas adjoining open water are the favoured nesting sites for waterfowl species. Coot, great crested grebe, little grebe, moorhen, mute swan, pochard, shoveler and tufted duck regularly breed and gadwall are normally resident during summer. The numbers of nesting great crested grebe are of special significance with recent marked increases making the colony the largest in Greater London and among the largest in Britain. Artificial raft islands anchored across the eastern reservoir arm attract another breeding species, common tern, and are used by waterfowl as loafing places. Further breeding species are recorded in the willow woodland, these include: bullfinch, greenfinch, jay, willow warbler and wren.

The wetlands are also of interest for their plant communities. The swamps are characteristically dominated by a single species, mainly bulrush *Typha latifolia* and common reed *Phragmites australis*. In contrast the fen communities comprise a complex

mixture of many wetland plants including: lesser pond-sedge *Carex acutiformis*, great willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum*, meadow-sweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, soft rush *Juncus effusus*, gypsywort *Lycopus europaeus*, water forget-me-not *Myosotis scorpioides*, reed canary-grass *Phalaris arundinacea*, branched bur-reed *Sparganium erectum* and marsh woundwort *Stachys palustris*. It is in this community type that most of the locally uncommon species are to be found, for example: water-plantain *Alisma plantago-aquatica*, flowering rush *Butomus umbellatus*, water dock *Rumex hydrolapathum* and lesser bulrush *Typha angustifolia*.

In winter the combination of secluded wetland, shallows and extensive open water serves to attract a wide range of waterfowl. Maximum counts of pochard and gadwall occasionally reach levels of national significance while wintering waders include snipe and jack snipe. The reservoir has also long been noted as one of the major wintering sites in Greater London for smew, the scarcest of the regularly wintering species of duck in Britain. Recently, in common with a regional trend, numbers have declined but it is still occasionally recorded in winter.