

COUNTY: OXFORDSHIRE

SITE NAME: IFFLEY MEADOWS

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

Local Planning Authorities: Oxford City Council, Vale of White Horse District Council, Oxfordshire County Council

National Grid Reference: SP524038

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 164 (Oxford) **1:10,000:** SP50 SW

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

Area: 36.2 ha 89.5 ac

Other information: Iffley Meadows is a nature reserve of the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Naturalists' Trust and is managed by agreement with the owners, Oxford City Council, and their tenants. Iffley Island is also a BBONT nature reserve, by agreement with the present owner, and managed to preserve the population of fritillaries.

Description and Reasons for Notification

Situated between two arms of the River Thames, Iffley Meadows are a series of alluvial flood meadows which are still managed traditionally as hay meadow and permanent pasture. The outstanding feature of a rich grassland flora, undamaged by farming improvements, is the largest remaining population of fritillaries *Fritillaria meleagris* in the middle Thames area.

The flora of Iffley Meadows varies in composition because of different management regimes and surface deposits. Much of the site lies on clay soils, enriched annually by floodwater silt and crossed by old river channels, willow-lined ditches and overgrown hedges. The vegetation is a notably species-rich and undamaged example of damp grassland dominated by tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa* with meadow foxtail *Alopecurus pratensis* and Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*. Apart from the fritillary, which grows in profusion in the central part of the meadow and also on the peninsula of the Thames known as Iffley Island, a number of other plants indicative of ancient meadows occur. These include adder's-tongue *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, greater burnet *Sanguisorba officinalis*, meadow rue *Thalictrum flavum*, pepper saxifrage *Silaum silaus*, water dropwort *Oenanthe fistulosa*, creeping Jenny *Lysimachia nummularia* and brown sedge *Carex disticha*. Parts of the meadow are covered by surface deposits of gravel resulting in a more acidic soil and a less species-rich and colourful flora, but common meadow flowers like meadow buttercup *Ranunculus acris*, marsh marigold *Caltha palustris*, ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi* and ox-eye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare* are widespread and abundant throughout the field.

The field south of the southern by-pass is wet permanent pasture and grazing marsh dominated by hard rush *Juncus inflexus*, greater pond-sedge *Carex riparia* and meadow sweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, while similar vegetation occurs in the smaller field north of Donnington Bridge. Extensive examples of unimproved marshland on rich soils are now rare in the lowland agricultural landscape and rarer still in built-up areas. They form an interesting contrast to the drier grassland in the central part of the site. The riverine scrub near Kennington junction is utilised by nesting songbirds including several species of warbler.