

Site Notified to The Secretary of State on 6 September 1994

COUNTY: AVON                      SITE NAME: BIDDLE STREET, YATTON

DISTRICT: WOODSPRING

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

Local Planning Authority: AVON COUNTY COUNCIL, Woodspring District Council

National Grid Reference: ST 423648                      Area: 44.8 (ha.) 110.7 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 172                      1:10,000: ST 46 NW/SW

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1994                      Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

A new site.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Situated to the west of Yatton, Biddle Street forms part of the Avon Levels and Moors, an extensive area of low lying agricultural land found to the north of the Mendip Hills.

The area lies mainly on the silty clays of the Wentlloog series, although to the south and east soils of the Compton Series are found. The latter are variably calcareous and are characterised by the presence of peat in the lower layers.

In common with other parts of the Levels and Moors, Biddle Street is drained by a network of rhynes and ditches. In many areas these act as 'wet fences' and provide water for the livestock that graze over the area during the summer months.

The combination of past/present management practices and the variation in the soils has resulted in the watercourses supporting a wide range of aquatic plant communities, many of which are of considerable nature conservation interest.

Where open water occurs plants such as Common Water-starwort *Callitriche stagnalis*, Frogbit *Hydrocharis morsus-ranae*, Fan-leaved Water-crowfoot *Ranunculus circinatus*, Nuttall's Waterweed *Elodea nuttallii*, Lesser Pondweed *Potamogeton pusillus*, Whorled Water-milfoil *Myriophyllum verticillatum* and Stonewort *Chara sp.* are found, the latter two species indicative of the calcareous influence of the underlying Compton soils. Also present are the nationally scarce Rootless Duckweed *Wolffia arrhiza* and Hairlike Pondweed *Potamogeton trichoides*.

Many of the field ditches also support a high diversity of emergent species. Branched Bur-reed *Sparganium erectum*, Lesser Water-parsnip *Berula erecta*, Water Horsetail *Equisetum fluviatile*, Tubular Water-dropwort *Oenanthe fistulosa* and Water-plantain *Alisma plantago-aquatica* are all common. Reed Sweet-grass *Glyceria maxima*, Reed Canary-grass *Phalaris arundinacea* and Common Reed *Phragmites australis* also occur and dominate some of the less frequently managed field ditches.

A number of ditches support a diverse bank flora. Ragged-Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, Brookweed *Samolus valerandi*, Brooklime *Veronica beccabunga*, Water Mint *Mentha aquatica*, Marsh Bedstraw *Galium palustre* and Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria* have all been recorded.

A rich invertebrate fauna is also associated with the rhynes and ditches. Good numbers of aquatic beetles *Coleoptera* are present including populations of two nationally rare species, *Hydacticus transversalis* and Britain's largest water beetle, the Great Silver Water Beetle *Hydrophilus piceus*, the latter being largely confined to grazing marshes of Southern Britain.

A number of dragonflies and damselflies are known to breed in the watercourses including Southern Hawker *Aeshna cyanea*, Blue-tailed Damselfly *Ischnura elegans* and the nationally scarce Variable Damselfly *Coenagrion pulchellum*.

Aquatic molluscs are also well-represented. Strong populations of the Common Freshwater Mussel occur as does the nationally rare Pea Mussel *Pisidium pseudosphaerium*.