

SITE NOTIFIED TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE ON 2 APRIL 1987

COUNTY: DURHAM

SITE NAME: WITTON-LE-WEAR

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

Local Planning Authorities: WEAR VALLEY DISTRICT COUNCIL, Teesdale District Council

National Grid Reference: NZ 163313

Ordnance Survey Sheets 1:50,000: 92

1:10,000: NZ 13 SE

Area: Wear Valley 31.48 (ha.) 77.85 (ac.)

Teesdale 4.68 (ha.) 11.5 (ac.)

Total: 36.16 (ha.) 89.35 (ac.)

First Notified: 1966*

Date of Revision: 1987

Description:

This site, which lies near the village of Witton-le-Wear includes the only extensive and biologically important open water body in West Durham. Although the interest of the site centres upon Marston Lake with its fringing tall fen vegetation there are, in addition, two smaller water bodies, areas of alder woodland and willow scrub, and recently developed neutral grasslands.

Mature alder *Alnus glutinosa* woodland occurs along the northern boundary of the site in a former channel of the River Wear and has a ground flora dominated by common nettle *Urtica dioica* and greater chickweed *Stellaria neglecta*, whilst scrub woodland containing alder and willows *Salix* spp. is developing on wetter areas.

Neutral grassland dominated by false oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius* and common bent *Agrostis capillaris* has developed over much of the site on dry, sandy soils and contains a variety of herbs including common knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, silverweed *Potentilla anserina*, common bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, agrimony *Agrimonia eupatoria* and yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor*. Features of particular interest are the extensive areas dominated by orchids including northern marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza purpurella*, common spotted-orchid *D. fuchsii* and early-purple orchid *Orchis mascula*.

Tall fen vegetation with bulrush *Typha latifolia*, meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria* and common marsh-bedstraw *Galium palustre* fringes part of the main lake.

The open water bodies, which have developed in abandoned sand and gravel workings beside the River Wear, now support a significant range of breeding birds typical of lowland open water sites including little and great-crested grebes, pochard, teal, mallard, tufted duck, water rail, moorhen and coot.

The invertebrate fauna of Marston Lake is locally notable and includes nine species of dragonfly. A red data book fly, *Opomyza punctella* and the rare leaf beetle, *Longitarsis reichei* are also recorded from this site.

Other Information:

1. This site is managed as a nature reserve by the Durham County Conservation Trust.
2. During the 1987 revision the boundary of this site has been amended to include land not previously notified* and to exclude land previously notified*.

*Under Section 23 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949.