

COUNTY: GREATER LONDON

SITE NAME: RUXLEY GRAVEL PITS

BOROUGH: BROMLEY

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

Local Planning Authority: London Borough of Bromley

National Grid Reference: TQ 474700

Area: 18.7 (ha.) approx 46.2 (ac.) approx

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 177

1:10,000: TQ 46 NE & TQ 47 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1975

Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

This site is managed as a nature reserve by the Kent Trust for Nature Conservation under an agreement with the Southern Water Authority.

Reasons for Notification:

Ruxley Gravel Pits are one of the few areas of relatively undisturbed open water in Greater London south of the Thames. They contain a high diversity of habitats and species; the variety of insects and breeding wetland birds are also notable features.

The site comprises four small gravel pits with patches of fen vegetation surrounded by a thin fringe of dry land. The River Cray flows through three of these pits while the fourth is fed by springs. The pits date from 1929 and with extraction ceasing in 1951 the pits have been colonised by an increasingly diverse range of plants and animals. Since 1947 when the first Kent record for breeding little ringed plover was noted, the bird community has evolved with the changing pattern of vegetation. Over 500 species of vascular plant and 169 species of bird, including 53 breeding species, have been recorded. There is also a species-rich community of insects with 23 butterfly, 9 dragonfly, and in excess of 500 beetle species. This variety of insects in particular reflects the structural and floristic diversity of the range of habitats present: wooded islands and fringes of mature trees, scrub, swamp and fen, and open water.

The margins of the pits support a scattered band of swamp and fen vegetation; on the northern bank of the main lake greater reed-mace *Typha latifolia*, reed-grass *Phalaris arundinacea* and mare's-tail *Hippuris vulgaris* predominates while in the south-eastern part of the site is a more extensive and species-rich fen community which contains an intricate mosaic of plants. This includes reed *Phragmites australis*, great willow-herb *Epilobium hirsutum*, reed-grass *Glyceria maxima*, common spikes-rush *Eleocharis palustris* and a number of sedges. Overall, ten species of sedge have been recorded including sand sedge *Carex arenaria* and the very local paniced sedge *Carex paniculata*. Among the bankside vegetation is the uncommon glaucous club rush *Schoenoplectus tabernaemontani* and one of the very few London stations for 'common' meadow rue *Thalictrum flavum*. The breeding bird community of this swamp and fen habitat is diverse and contains species such as great crested grebe, little grebe, tufted duck, reed bunting, reed and sedge warblers. Wintering birds include water rail and snipe.

The open water areas, particularly the small northern pit, contain scattered rafts of yellow water-lily *Nuphar lutea* and white water-lily *Nymphaea alba*. The water quality is generally high and supports a good diversity of fresh water invertebrates which have been studied on a number of occasions. Other aquatic plants include horn-wort *Ceratophyllum demersum*, spiked water milfoil *Myriophyllum spicatum*, and a number

of pond weeds *Potamogeton* species. A range of waterfowl is present throughout the winter months.

The beetle fauna contains over 30 species with a localised distribution including the ground beetle *Demetrias imperialis*. This is found in the decaying stems of greater reed-mace in only one part of the site and is considered to be an indicator of good wetland conditions. The least carpet moth *Idaea vulpinaria* is one of four notable species of moth, while the site is also of significance for the diversity of dragonflies.