

KENT LOCAL WILDLIFE SITE

KWT File no: 988424

Site:	River Great Stour, Ashford to Fordwich	Site Ref. No:	AS27
LPA:	Ashford/Canterbury	Grid Refs:	TQ 988424 to TR 182599
Parish:	Boughton Aluph/ Chartham/ Chilham/ Crundale/ Fordwich/ Godmersham/ Great Chart with Singleton/ Sturry/ Thanington Without/ Westbere/ Wye with Hinxhill	Category:	Running water, standing water, grassland, woodland, parkland, scrub, marsh
Owner:	Private	Natural Area:	Wealden Greensand, North Downs, North Kent Plain
Area:	410 ha	AONB:	Kent Downs
First notified:	1986		
Last survey:	2005		
Last approved:	Oct 2006		

REASON FOR DESIGNATION

This stretch of the River Great Stour is largely natural in character and supports a wide range of submerged, emergent and marginal aquatic plants including several which are rare and uncommon in Kent. It includes a substantial chalk river stretch between Wye and Chilham which supports stream water-crowfoot *Ranunculus penicillatus* and brown trout *Salmo trutta*. Water quality is good throughout almost the entire length of the river within the Local Wildlife Site.

RATIONALE FOR SITE BOUNDARY

The boundary has been drawn to include areas of fen, marsh, swamp, wet woodland and wet grassland, and areas of standing open water which are contiguous with the river corridor. Where such habitats do not abut the river corridor, the boundary of the site should be taken to be a line 5m from the top of the river bank, or the outer edge of any semi-natural vegetation along the river, whichever is the shorter distance. Where the boundary runs along a wet ditch or dyke, the full width of the ditch or dyke should be included within the site.

DESCRIPTION

The large and varied complex along the floodplain of the River Great Stour between Ashford and Fordwich provides a valuable wildlife corridor which includes a variety of habitats. The most important of these is the river itself, which is almost without exception of good water quality, and well-vegetated with aquatic, emergent and marginal species throughout.

Associated habitats include areas of wet grassland, wet woodland and swamp, and a few areas of unimproved neutral and calcareous grassland. In addition, there is a series of open lakes which have resulted from worked-out gravel excavations. These are present at Willesborough, below Chilham and at Sturry. The lakes are generally surrounded by secondary woodland, scrub and occasionally by marshy grassland. They provide valuable open water roosting areas and nesting



refuges for resident and migrant birds and are important for invertebrates. Most are used by fishing clubs. The area at Sturry is managed as the Canterbury Nature Reserve and serves as an educational centre.

At Olantigh and Godmersham, the river passes through privately-owned parkland. The water is not fished in these areas and is particularly rich in aquatic plant life here. The grassland with mature parkland trees at Godmersham is sheep-grazed and the banks of the river at this point are also grazed. At Olantigh there is some unimproved grassland with mature trees.

Several small, damp alder copses and woods occur along the river by small streams and flushes. These are almost fen-like in character, with peaty soils flushed by basic minerals from the chalk. Opposite-leaved golden-saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* and marsh marigold *Caltha palustris* are common. On drier soils, small mixed broadleaved woodland occurs, with ash, hazel and field maple coppice with pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* standards and common woodland herbs.

The river itself is of mainly lowland clay catchment character to Wye, but from Olantigh downstream, where it cuts through the North Downs, it has a well-developed, chalk-like character, and the flow is increased by substantial chalk springs. Hybrids between shining pondweed ¹ *Potamogeton lucens* and perfoliate pondweed ¹ *P. perfoliatus* have been recorded in the Godmersham area.

Through Ashford, the banks of the river are largely natural, with only a few stretches having hard embankments. As a result, the river through the town supports a good range of emergent and marginal plant species, as well as a good range of submerged aquatic plants. Long stretches of the river through Ashford have mature alders *Alnus glutinosa* and willows *Salix* spp. along the banks.

Where the river passes through Canterbury, the surrounds are more urban and industrial, though only relatively short sections of the river are hard-edged.

A rich variety of aquatic species occur throughout, even within the urban sections, with river water-dropwort ¹ *Oenanthe fluviatilis*, shining pondweed ¹, perfoliate pondweed ¹, chalk stream water-crowfoot ¹ *Ranunculus penicillatus* and unbranched bur-reed ¹ *Sparganium emersum*, all species associated with rivers with good flow. Further downstream, below Canterbury, fennel pondweed *Potamogeton pectinatus* is more common. Common aquatic species such as water-starwort *Callitriche* spp., waterweeds *Elodea* spp. and spiked water milfoil *Myriophyllum spicatum* are frequent. Where the flow is lower, characteristic species such as yellow water-lily *Nuphar lutea*, water-starwort, amphibious bistort *Polygonum amphibium* and rigid hornwort *Ceratophyllum demersum* are more in evidence. These species are also found in the open water of the lakes and, occasionally, in the floodplain ditches.

Marginal and emergent plants range from stands of tall species such as great willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum*, meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, reed canary-grass *Phalaris arundinacea*, branched bur-reed *Sparganium erectum*, water dock *Rumex hydrolapathum* and yellow iris *Iris pseudacorus* to smaller species such as water chickweed *Myosoton aquaticum*, water forget-me-not *Myosotis scorpioides*, water plantain *Alisma plantago-aquatica*, reed sweet-grass *Glyceria maxima*, hemlock water-dropwort *Oenanthe crocata*, purple-loosestrife *Lythrum salicaria*, lesser water-parsnip *Berula erecta* and brooklime *Veronica beccabunga*. The lower-growing species are more in evidence where the banks of the river have been broken down by stock and also in the floodplain ditches.

Common meadow rue ² *Thalictrum flavum* occurs in relict marshy scrub near Shalmsford Street and south of Wye at TQ 048467. The large colony is present in a marshy area/reedbed upstream from Wye.

The riverine moss *Fontinalis antipyretica* occurs in the section below Canterbury. This species has declined generally throughout Kent in recent years.

The invertebrate fauna of the river is very important, and includes some rare coleoptera. Five nationally notable diptera and one RDB2 species have been recorded from the Vauxhall Lakes area alone. The river also supports a good variety of dragonflies and damselflies, with the banded demoiselle *Calopteryx splendens* abundant along its whole length within the site. Other species associated with still water are present in ditches and on lakes, with eleven species having been recorded in the area below Canterbury alone. In addition 82 insect species from nine orders were identified from one visit to Singleton Lake including the notable *Oscinella angularis* Collin.

Otters *Lutra lutra* ^{3,4} are known to occur along this stretch of the Stour, and water voles *Arvicola terrestris* ^{3,4,5,6} have been recorded recently, including within the urban area of Ashford. The white-clawed crayfish *Austropotamobius pallipes* previously occurred between Wye and Canterbury, but is now mainly found in the river upstream of Ashford and at Chilham.

The river is important for fly-fishing, particularly downstream of Wye, and supports trout (including sea trout) *Salmo trutta* and small numbers of salmon *Salmo salar*.

The site is well recorded for birds, and the lakes and gravel pits along the river such as those at Conningbrook, Chilham and Chartham attract winter visitors including wigeon ⁷, teal ^{7,8}, pochard ^{7,9}, shoveler ⁷, gadwall ⁷, goosander and smew. Kingfisher ^{3,7}, grey heron, breeding mute swan ⁷, grey wagtail ⁷ and yellow wagtail ⁷ are present. Bittern ^{3,4,10} has been observed occasionally. Other water birds recorded include snipe ^{7,8}, water rail ^{7,9}, great crested grebe and little grebe, together with good numbers of lapwing ⁷. Other species recorded include nightingale ^{7,9}, Cetti's warbler ³, goldcrest ⁷, bullfinch ^{4,6,10}, marsh tit ¹⁰, reed bunting ^{4,6,10}, corn bunting ^{4,6,10} and good numbers of linnet ^{4,6,10}. More unusual birds such as spotted crake ^{3,7} have been recorded very occasionally in recent years.

- ¹ County Scarce. Atlas of Kent Flora. Philp. 1982.
- ² County Rare. Atlas of Kent Flora. Philp. 1982.
- ³ Protected under Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981.
- ⁴ Priority Species, UK Biodiversity Action Plan. 1998.
- ⁵ National Status RDB.
- ⁶ Kent Red Data Book Status 2. A. Waite (Ed.) 2000.
- ⁷ Amber List. Birds of Conservation Concern 2002-2007.
- ⁸ Kent Red Data Book Status 1. A. Waite (Ed.) 2000.
- ⁹ Kent Red Data Book Status 3. A. Waite (Ed.) 2000.
- ¹⁰ Red List. Birds of Conservation Concern 2002-2007.

