

EC Directive 92/43 on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora

Citation for Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

Name: River Wensum
Unitary Authority/County: Norfolk
SAC status: Designated on 1 April 2005
Grid reference: TG022176
SAC EU code: UK0012647
Area (ha): 381.74
Component SSSI: River Wensum SSSI

Site description:

The Wensum is a naturally enriched, calcareous lowland river. The upper reaches are fed by springs that rise from the chalk and by run-off from calcareous soils rich in plant nutrients. This gives rise to beds of submerged and emergent vegetation characteristic of a chalk stream. Lower down, the chalk is overlain with boulder clay and river gravels, resulting in aquatic plant communities more typical of a slow-flowing river on mixed substrate. Much of the adjacent land is managed for hay crops and by grazing, and the resulting mosaic of meadow and marsh habitats, provides niches for a wide variety of specialised plants and animals.

Ranunculus vegetation occurs throughout much of the river's length. Stream water-crowfoot *R. penicillatus* ssp. *pseudofluitans* is the dominant *Ranunculus* species but thread-leaved water-crowfoot *R. trichophyllus* and fan-leaved water-crowfoot *R. circinatus* also occur in association with the wide range of aquatic and emergent species that contribute to this vegetation type. The river supports an abundant and rich invertebrate fauna including the native freshwater crayfish *Austropotamobius pallipes* as well as a diverse fish community, including bullhead *Cottus gobio* and brook lamprey *Lampetra planeri*. The site has an abundant and diverse mollusc fauna which includes Desmoulin's whorl-snail *Vertigo moulinsiana*, which is associated with aquatic vegetation at the river edge and adjacent fens.

Qualifying habitats: The site is designated under **article 4(4)** of the Directive (92/43/EEC) as it hosts the following habitats listed in Annex I:

- Water courses of plain to montane levels with the *Ranunculion fluitantis* and *Callitriche-Batrachion* vegetation. (Rivers with floating vegetation often dominated by water-crowfoot)

Qualifying species: The site is designated under **article 4(4)** of the Directive (92/43/EEC) as it hosts the following species listed in Annex II:

- White-clawed (or Atlantic stream) crayfish *Austropotamobius pallipes*
- Bullhead *Cottus gobio*
- Brook lamprey *Lampetra planeri*
- Desmoulin's whorl snail *Vertigo moulinsiana*

This citation relates to a site entered in the Register of European Sites for Great Britain.

Register reference number: UK0012647

Date of registration: 14 June 2005

Signed: *Trew Salmon*

On behalf of the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs