

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 Itchen
Unitary Authority/County:	City of Southampton, Hampshire
SAC status:	Designated on 1 April 2005
Grid reference:	SU467174
SAC EU code:	UK0012599
Area (ha):	309.26
Component SSSI:	River Itchen SSSI

Site description:

The Itchen typifies the classic chalk river and shows a greater uniformity in physical characteristics along its entire length than other rivers of this type. Since the river is mainly spring-fed, there is only a narrow range of seasonal variation in physical and chemical characteristics. The water is of high quality, being naturally base-rich and of great clarity; and its temperature is relatively constant, with dissolved oxygen levels at or near saturation.

The river's vegetation is dominated by higher plants, and the aquatic flora is exceptionally species rich with many of the typical chalk stream plants present in abundance. The majority of species are present throughout the system and downstream changes are less than in most other rivers. The river is rich in invertebrates and supports diverse populations of aquatic molluscs. The Itchen supports one of the few populations of the native freshwater crayfish remaining in the rivers of southern England and a population of otters.

The river is dominated throughout by aquatic *Ranunculus* spp. The headwaters contain pond water-crowfoot *Ranunculus peltatus*, while two *Ranunculus* species occur further downstream: stream water-crowfoot *R. penicillatus* ssp. *pseudofluitans*, a species especially characteristic of calcium-rich rivers, and river water-crowfoot *R. fluitans*.

The fish fauna of the Itchen is typical of lowland chalk rivers. Strong populations of bullhead *Cottus gobio* and brook lamprey *Lampetra planeri* are notable elements of the natural fish fauna. The river provides good water quality, extensive beds of submerged plants that act as a refuge for the species, and coarse sediments that are vital for spawning and juvenile development. The river's runs of Atlantic salmon *Salmo salar* fluctuate markedly.

The upper and mid river provides much suitable habitat for otters. A localised population of Atlantic stream crayfish *Austropotamobius pallipes* remains in a headwater of the river.

The Itchen valley contains areas of fen, swamp and meadow supporting vegetation with diverse plant communities, some typically species-rich. Meadow ditches support strong populations of southern damselfly *Coenagrion mercuriale*. The numbers recorded place the site amongst the most important in Britain for this species.

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:

- Atlantic salmon *Salmo salar*
- Brook lamprey *Lampetra planeri*
- Bullhead *Cottus gobio*
- Otter *Lutra lutra*
- Southern damselfly *Coenagrion mercuriale*
- White-clawed (or Atlantic stream) crayfish *Austropotamobius pallipes*

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

Register reference number: UK0012599

Date of registration: 14 June 2005

Signed: *Trevor Salmon*

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