Birmingham & Black Country Local Sites Assessment Report

EcoRecord Reference	Site Name	Grid Reference	Designation(s)	Survey Date(s)
WA096	Bentley Mill Lane	SO991977	SLINC	18/10/2018
Planning Authority	Site Ownership	Area/Length	Reason for Survey	Report Date
Walsall M.B.C.	Private	3.36 ha	Black Country Call for Sites	13/12/18
Meets LS Criteria	SLINC	Туре	Wildlife	i.e. Wildlife/Geological
Amendment(s)	None	i.e. None; New Site; Up	ograde; Downgrade; Extensi	ion; Whole/Part Deletion
Description				

Citation (Summary of Value)

Bentley Mill lane is an area of former industrial land which more recently went under disturbance and has now recovered well. Succession is taking place across the site and there is a mosaic of habitats including: neutral grassland, tall ruderal, standing water, bare ground, scrub and scattered trees. The site has good connectivity to the surrounding River Tame and Walsall Canal corridors in a heavily developed area.

Habitat Diversity			
The site has been left ummanaged and has developed a mosaic of habitats including: scrub, tall ruderal, standing water, bare ground and semi-improved neutral grassland. Ecological succession and variation within mammade trial pits and scrapes on site has created further habitat variation within grassland and standing water habitats. Due to the range of habitats there is relatively high flora species diversity supporting water associated plants, neutral grassland species and woodland species. However, the variation within each habitat is less diverse with a few individual species being frequent across the site. As multiple habitats are present the site is suited to supporting amphibians such as smooth newts which were found during the survey. There were further incidental sightings of numerous dragnofily and bird species. Habitat Rarity M The dominating ruderal, scrub and grassland habitats are common across the Birmingham and Black Country area. The ponds on site are listed as habitats of principal importance. The majority of flora species recorded on site have been identified as frequent to common within Birmingham and the Black Country. However, one uncommon flora species was recorded on site, Common Sedge (Carex Nigra). A Green Woodpecker (Picus viridis), listed as amber within the Birds of Conservation Concern was noted onsite, and during the Phase 1 habitat survey there were multiple incidental sightings of smooth newts (Lissatriton vulgaris). Size or Extent M In the context of Walsall, Land at Darlaston Road may be considered of 'Medium' extent. Position & Tormer industrial and previously disturbed land, the current habitats have been unintentionally created and are dominated by native species which have colonised the site naturally. Position & Tormer industrial and previously disturbed land, the current habitats have been unintentionally created and are dominated by native species which have colonised the site naturally. Position & Tormer industrial and previously disturbed land, the current hab		eria	
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Site Description

Bentley Mill Lane, also referred to as Land at Darlaston Road, is currently designated as a SLINC. It is suitably positioned with the River Tame to its west and Walsall Canal SLINC to the north. The eastern boundary runs along the M6 motorway embankment, whilst the south runs along Darlaston Road. Other designated sites within 1km of Bentley Mill Lane include Anson Branch Canal, Anson Road and James Bridge Gasworks. The site is also surrounded by corridors of Potential Sites of Importance including: Primley Avenue Park, James Brdige Cemetry, Tame Valley and Pleck Park.

Historically the area is former industrial land with historic maps showing numerous coillerys in the surrounding area with old mine shafts being present onsite. Other industrial activity, including James Bridge Copper Works (formely located to the north-east), has led to probable heavy metal contaminations onsite (see photograph 4). There are no Ordnance Survey records of any buildings ever being present onsite so its historical use is unclear.

The previous site report describes recent disturbance resulting in the loss of grassland and scrub habitat. Since this time the site has been left unmanaged to naturally regenerate, forming a mosaic of habitats similar to those previously present. Due to the lack of management, succession has resulted in a large central expanse of tall ruderal habitat and numerous sections of dense Bramble scrub; woodland trees, particuarly Silver Birch, are beginning to self-set and dominate pockets of land in the central area. There are two areas of rank semi-improved neutral grassland, in the south-west corner close to Darlaston Road and in the far south-east corner along the boundary edge. These areas would benefit well from management, particaurly the south-east corner, which shows less evidence of successional growth and offers the potential for a species-rich grassland. Other smaller areas of grassland are present in central areas but are being lost to succession. Former disturbance and ground investigation works left ditches and scraps in the ground which now hold standing water and have become vegetated by marshy grassland species, such as reedmace and rushes. The disturbance also created earth mounds which have become vegetated and left areas of bare rubble ground in the central region. Along the south-west region of the canal there is scattered scrub with indidual mature White Willow (Salix alba) and Crack Willow (Salix fragilis) trees. Following on north this becomes tall ruderal habitat and then scrub along the north slope adjacent to the canal. There is recently disturbed ground on the north-east boundary where large patches of Broom (Cytisus scoparius) have been burnt.

Due to the restricted access there is limited use of the site. However, it should be noted that fly tipping and burning of car parts is evident in mulitpe locations on the site.

Habitats

Phase 1 Name Broad-leaved scattered trees Phase 1 Code A31

Amongst the central ruderal expanse there is an area of self-set semi-mature trees, comprising of Silver Birch (*Betula pendula*), Bay-leaved Willow (*Salix pentandra*) and Hazel (*Corylus avellana*). This provides partial shade to the series of ponds.

Phase 1 Name Dense Scrub - Bramble Phase 1 Code A21

Along the northern boundary the embankment is dominated by dense Bramble scrub. The embankment itself is steep over 45 degrees and has Elder (*Sambucus nigra*), Male-fern (*Dryopteris filix-mas*), Silver Birch, Rosebay Willowherb and Nettle (*Urtica dioica*) scattered throughout the Bramble dominated stretch. Other patches of Bramble scrub appear across the western side, encroaching onto ruderal and grassland habitat.

Phase 1 Name Scattered Scrub Phase 1 Code A22

Along the south-west boundary edge the habitat is predominantly semi-mature scattered scrub; three large semi-mature Crack Willow (Salix fragilis) trees and White Willow (Salix alba) trees surrounded by Hawthorn (Crataegus monogyna), Dogwood (Cornus sanguinea), Bramble (Rubus fruticosus) and Rosebay Willowherb (Chamerion angustifolium) scrub. A similar habitat is present along the southern boundary with individual semi-mature Oak (Quercus robur), Hazel (Corylus avellana) and Silver Birch.

Phase 1 Name Neutral Grassland – semi-improved Phase 1 Code B22

There are two main areas of semi-improved neutral grassland. The first on the southern side of the site, running along Darlaston Road, is tussocky and rank, dominated by Cocks-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*) but contains species of note such as Zigzag Clover (*Trifolium medium*). The area is however becoming encroached by scrub and ruderal vegetation. On the eastern side close to the boundary fence the grassland show less evidence of successional growth, and is instead dominated by False Oat-grass (*Arrhenatherum elatius*) and Tufted Hair-grass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*). This section has restricted encroachment and a larger number of forbs. If managed this area has good potential for high species diversity.

Phase 1 Name Marsh Grassland Phase 1 Code B5

Surrounding the areas of interconnected ephemeral ponds and colonising the wet ditches are water associated plants, including Soft-rush (*Juncus effusus*), Hard-rush (*Juncus inflexus*) and Reedmace (*Typha latifolia*).

Phase 1 Name Tall Ruderal Phase 1 Code C31

A large central portion of the site is a ruderal expanse dominated by Rosebay Willowherb with patches of Reed Canary-grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*), Garden Lupin (*Lupinus polyphyllus*) and Creeping Thistle (*Cirsium arvense*). There are areas of Bramble scrub and self-set trees interspersed throughout, including Silver Birch (*Betula pendula*), Dogwood and Hazel (*Corylus avellana*). The canal embankment on the western side of the site is also dominated by the same ruderal vegetation.

Phase 1 Name Standing Water Phase 1 Code G1

Across the central and eastern areas of the site there are small areas of standing water and impeded drainage. On the eastern side there appears to be a ground soil investigation trench holding water (~approximately 3metres wide and 0.5metres deep). This trench is mostly unshaded and densely vegetated along its entire length with Soft-rush and Reedmace. The area is partially shaded by semi-mature Bay Willow (Salix pentandra) and Alder (Alnus glutinosa), with marginal grassland and ruderal habitat surrounding the area. Continuing across the eastern edge there are numerous smaller misshapen ephemeral pools of water which form interconnected islands, the pools are approximately 30cm deep and contain water associated plants. Marginal habitat is grassland containing Soft-rush, Yorkshire-fog (Holcus lanatus), Tufted-hair grass, Creeping Soft-grass (Holcus mollis) and Reedmace. This is

ideal habitat for amphibians, newts were found onsite in these areas. Additionally, these ponds were attracting numerous dragonflies who appeared to be laying eggs in the water.

Phase 1 Name Ephemeral/short perennial Phase 1 Code J13

On the north-eastern side there is a stretch of burnt ground and remnants of burnt Broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) remain. This is not recent as burnt areas are being colonised by short perennial species.

Phase 1 Name Bare Ground Phase 1 Code J4

Central amongst the dominated ruderal expanse are areas of bare ground and earth mounds with rubble. The surrounding vegetation is predominantly ruderal containing Rosebay Willowherb, Tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*) and Toadflax (*Linaria vulgaris*). The area also contains scattered self-set Silver Birch trees.

Notes

Habitats of Note [1]						
Phase 1 Name	Phase 1 Code	EHD	BAP	NERC	Rarity	Year Recorded
Ponds (standing water)		HabRegs1	UKBAP	NERC HoPl		2018
Notes						

Species	Species of Note [1]							
Flora	Flora							
Species	Common Name	Statutory	ВАР	NERC	RL	Rarity	Axiophyte	Year Recorded
Agrostis canina	Velvety Bentgrass					U	BBCF_Ax	1989
Carex nigra	Common Sedge					U	BBCF_Ax	2018
Centaurium erythraea	Common Centaury					F	BBCF_Ax	2002
Deschampsia flexuosa	Wavy Hair-grass					F	BBCF_Ax	1987
Erigeron acris	Blue Fleabane					U	BBCF_Ax	2010
Filipendula ulmaria	Meadowsweet					F	BBCF_Ax	2018
Juncus acutiflorus	Sharp-flowered Rush					U	BBCF_Ax	1987
Lysimachia vulgaris	Garden Loosestrife					R	BBCF_Ax	2002
Reseda lutea	Wild Mignonette					F	BBCF_Ax	1989
Silene vulgaris	Bladder Campion					F	BBCF_Ax	2010
Trifolium medium	Zigzag Clover					F	BBCF_Ax	2018
Equisetum fluviatile	Water Horsetail					U	BBCF_Ax	2002
Notes								

Fauna								
Species	Common Name	Statutory	ВАР	NERC	RL	Concern	Rarity	Year Recorded
Alauda arvensis	Eurasian Skylark		UKBAP LBAP	Y		Red	С	1989
Alcedo atthis	Common Kingfisher	WCA1i				Amber	F	2010
Anas platyrhynchos	Mallard					Amber	С	2002
Anthus pratensis	Meadow Pipit					Amber	С	1989
Chroicocephalus ridibundus	Black-headed Gull					Amber	С	2002
Lissotriton vulgaris	Smooth Newt	WCA5/9.5a, WCA5/9.5b	LBAP				F	2018
Passer domesticus	House Sparrow		UKBAP	Y		Red	VC	2002
Picus viridis	Green Woodpecker					Amber	F	2018
Sturnus vulgaris	Common Starling		UKBAP	Υ		Red	VC	2010
Turdus philomelos	Song Thrush		UKBAP	Υ		Red	С	1989
Turdus viscivorus	Mistle Thrush					Red	С	2002

Site/Habitat Suitability for Other Species of Note (not recorded during the survey)

Description/Notes

Multiple interconnected pools of standing water and scrub and woodland habitat across the site provide good potential aquatic and terrestrial habitat for Great Crested Newts.

The varied vegetation structure alongside areas of bare rubble ground provides sheltering and basking opportunities for common species of reptiles, especially as the site has good connectivity.

Invasive Species [2]					
Species	Common Name	Location	Abundance (DAFOR)	Year Recorded	
Crocosmia pottsii x aurea = C. x crocosmiiflora	Montbretia	Towards Eastern boundary	R	2018	
Fallopia japonica	Japanese Knotweed	Eastern boundary	R	2018	
Impatiens glandulifera	Himalayan Balsam	North-West corner adjacent to river	R	2018	

Notes

A stand of Japanese Knotweed is present on the eastern boundary against the M6 embankment fence. Two patches of Montbretia lie on the eastern side behind a patch of woodland trees. Himalayan Balsam occurs along the river bank in the north-west corner.

Geology				
Solid/Drift Formation		Pennine Lower Coal Measures Formation – Mudstone, Siltstone, and Sandstone. Superficial Geology - Glaciofluvial deposits of Sand and Gravel and Alluvium – Clay, Silt, Sand and Gravel.		
Description		Sedimentary Bedrock formed approximately 318 to 319 million years ago in the Carboniferous Period.		
Features of Value				
1	None recorde	d.		

Soils

Due to the presence of neutral grassland species it can be inferred the soil has a neutral pH and is relatively nutrient rich. There was evidence of percolating heavy metals on the western boundary edge, suggesting soil contamination from historic metal works.

Public Access & Site Usage				
Land Use Post-industrial.				
Access Level	Restricted.			
Access Type(s)	Private.			

Comparison with Previous Survey(s) Results

The most recent survey completed in 2010 states the site underwent disturbance from heavy machinery and was dominated by bare/ephemeral vegetation, with fragments of neutral grassland remaining towards the boundary edge. This recently created brownfield site has now undergone succession and the disturbed land is now dominated by tall ruderal vegetation and wetland plants in the wetter areas. The areas of neutral grassland are still intact but are becoming encroached by scrub. There appears to be more areas of standing water, which are interconnected, than previously reported. Japanese Knotweed has been further reduced since the last report, possibly due to the burning taking place onsite. Overall, the site appears to have recovered well from the disturbance.

Boundary (notes)

Adjacent landuse to the south consists of mown grassland for parking for business use. There is easy access to the site, evidence of commerical waste and poultry kept on the boundary. River Tame to the west is surrounded by scrub and ruderal habitat dominated by Bramble, Nettle, Cow Parsley and Broad-leaved dock.

Summary of Assessment

Bentley Mill Lane is currently designated as a SLINC and is in a good position to support and connect the surrounding River Tame and Walsall Canal corridors. The site itself supports a range of habitats; of particular note are the ponds of standing water which are listed as habitats of principle importance. The site has recovered from disturbance since the last report and is in need of management to prevent the varied habitats being lost to succession. A number of management recommendations have been provided to improve the current ecological value of the site.

When assessed against the Birmingham & Black Country Local Sites Selection Criteria the site scores Medium against most of the ecological criteria. Therefore, the site meets the threshold to maintain its designation as a Site of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (SLINC).

Recommendations (including further survey & site management/enhancement)						
1	Further surveys should be undertaken to establish whether the site is used by species of note, such as Great Crested Newts, and/or if they are present in the surrounding area.					
2	Removal or treatment of Himalayan Balsam, Japanese Knotweed and Montbretia should be a priority to prevent their spread. Regular monitoring should be undertaken to identify areas of new colonisation.					
3	Removing litter and fly tipping will benefit the site. Change in neighbouring land use may alleviate this problem and prevent further pollution incidents occurring onsite.					
4	Develop and begin a meadow management plan for the areas of neutral grassland. This should include: an annual cut and removal of arising's and uprooting the encroaching scrub.					
5	Management of tall-herb and ruderal vegetation through rotational cuts. This leaves areas to be utilised by insects, small mammals and birds but prevents it from becoming scrub.					
6	Current pond areas could be excavated further to ensure areas of standing water do not dry out. Tall vegetation should be left nearby to provide cover and foraging habitat.					
7	If regularly management were to take place the introduction of hedgerows would be a good enhancement to the site, providing corridors for fauna to access the bordering River Tame and Walsall Canal.					

Data Sources		
	Source	Date
Species and Habitat Data Source(s)	The Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country. Ecorecord data search 2018	18/10/2018
Geological Data Source(s)	British Geological Society 1:50,000 bedrock & superficial deposits GIS web map services from BGS website: https://www.bgs.ac.uk/data/services/mash-ups/desktopgis.html	22/11/18
Historic Data Sources(s)	Ordnance Survey Country Series Mapping 1884 - 1992 Quigley, P. 2010 Black Country Historic Landscape Characterisation, electronic dataset, Wolverhampton City Council.	2018
Assessment Author and Organisation	The Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country.	2018

[1] HABITATS/SPECIES OF NOTE TABLES – ATTRIBUTE DEFINITIONS

STATUTORY (PROTECTED) -

EHD = EU Habitats Directive (plus where relevant the Annexe II or IV). PBA = Protection of Badgers Act 1992.

WCA S1 = Wildlife & Countryside Act Schedule 1 (birds protected at all times). WCA S5 = Wildlife & Countryside Act Schedule 5 (animals with various levels of protection). WCA S8 = Wildlife & Countryside Act Schedule 8 (higher and lower plants with various levels of protection).

BAP - Habitats/Species included on latest UK BAP list of Priority Habitats/Species.

NERC P.I. - Habitats/Species included on current list of Principal Importance in England under Section 41 of the NERC Act (2006 or amended).

RL - Species included on Global IUCN & British Red Lists (Red Data Books).

RARITY (HABITATS) - BIRMINGHAM & BLACK COUNTRY - Habitats included on the B&BC list of locally rare habitats (administered by EcoRecord).

RARITY (FLORA SPECIES) - BIRMINGHAM & BLACK COUNTRY - (based on data held and managed by EcoRecord).

VR = Very Rare - a species present in less than 1.0% of 1Km squares, tetrads, or 5Km squares in B&BC.

R = Rare - a species present in 1.0% - 4.3% of 1Km squares, tetrads, or 5Km squares in B&BC.

U = Uncommon - a species present in 4.3% - 12% of 1Km squares, tetrads or 5Km squares in B&BC.

AXIOPHYTE - included on the Birmingham & the Black Country list of axiophytes.

CONCERN (FAUNA SPECIES OF CONSERVATION CONCERN) -

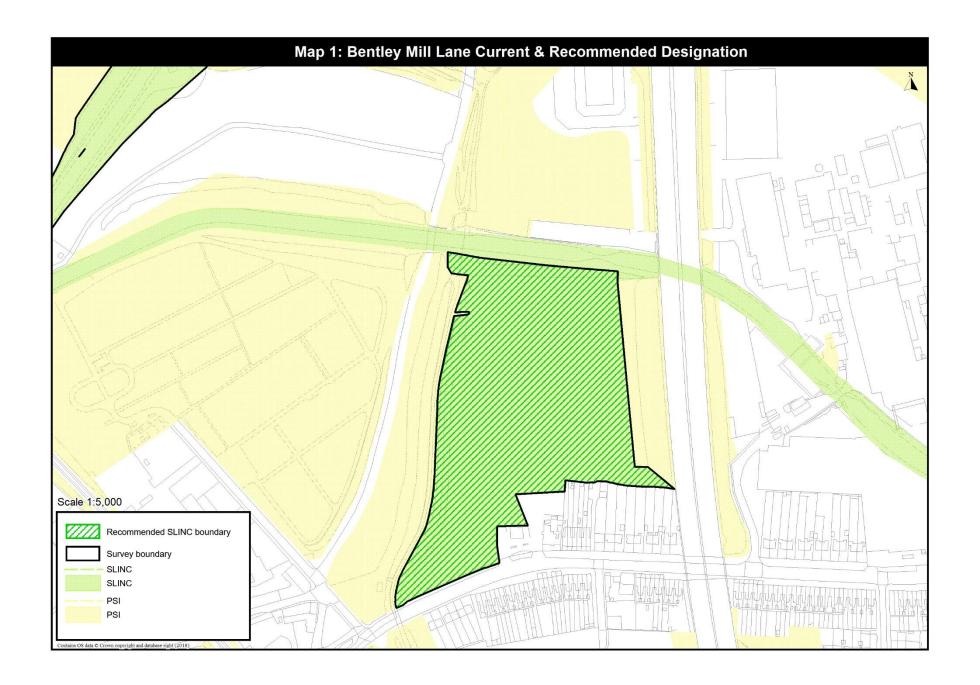
Birds: R = Red List - species that are Globally Threatened according to the International Union for Nature Conservation criteria; those whose population or range has declined rapidly in recent years; and those that have declined historically and not shown a substantial recent recovery. A = Amber List - species with an unfavourable conservation status in Europe; those whose population or range has declined moderately in recent years; those whose population has declined historically but made a substantial recent recovery; rare breeders; and those with internationally important or localised populations.

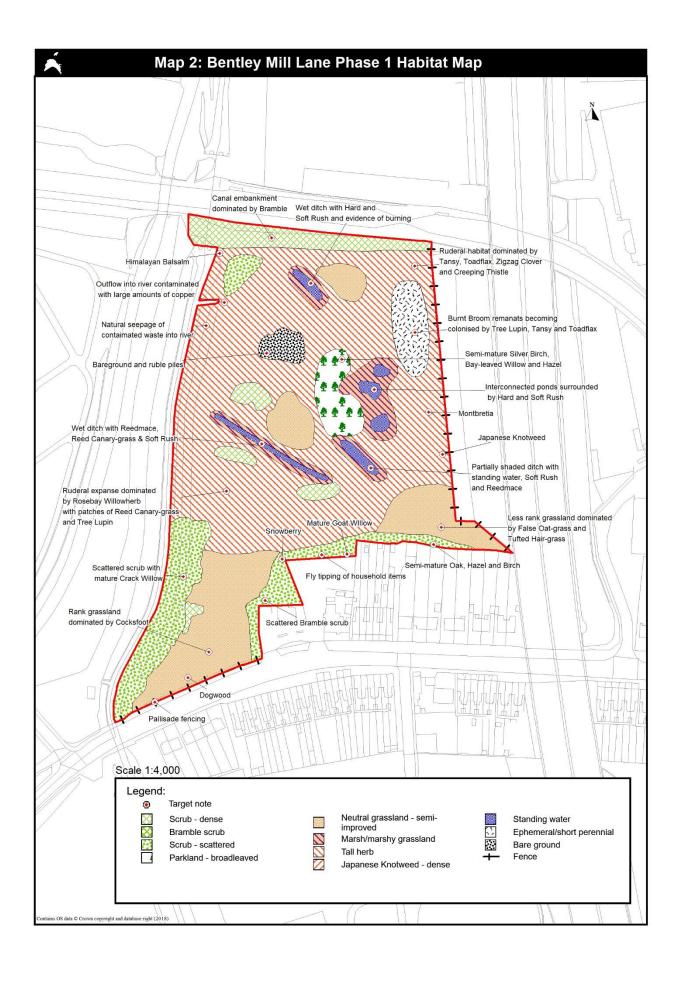
Mammals: ND = National Decline and ED = England Decline as measured by the Mammal Societies Table of Recent Population Changes in the Native Species of Land Mammals.

Invertebrates: RD = Regional Decline identified in Butterfly Conservation West Midlands Regional Action Plan.

YEAR - The most recent year the species has been recorded.

[2] Species listed on Schedule 9 part 1 (animals) and part 2 (plants) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended - this lists animals which may not be released or allowed to escape into the wild and plants which may not be planted or otherwise caused to grow in the wild.







Photograph 1: Series of interconnected ponds with surrounding water associated vegetation.



Photograph 2: Area of neutral grassland to the south-east looking towards scrub and ruderal habitat.



Photograph 3: River Tame on the western boundary.



Photograph 4: Outflow showing possible heavy metal contamination leading to the River Tame.



Photograph 5: Central expanse of dominating ruderal vegetation.

Species Records

Flora Species List

Scientific Name	Common Name
Acer pseudoplatanus	Sycamore
Achillea millefolium	Yarrow
Agrostis capillaris	Common Bent
Alnus glutinosa	Alder
Anthriscus sylvestris	Cow Parsley
Arrhenatherum elatius	False Oat-grass
Artemisia vulgaris	Mugwort
Aster	Michaelmas-Daisy
Betula pendula	Silver Birch
Calystegia sepium	Bindweed
Carex nigra	Common Sedge
Centaurea nigra	Common Knapweed
Cerastium fontanum	Common MZouse-ear
Chamerion angustifolium	Rosebay Willowherb
Cirsium arvense	Creeping Thistle
Cirsium vulgare	Spear Thistle
Cornus sanguinea	Dogwood
Corylus avellana	Hazel
Crataegus monogyna	Hawthorn
Crocosmia pottsii x aurea = C. x crocosmiiflora	Montbretia
Cytisus scoparius	Broom

Dactylis glomerata Deschampsia cespitosa

Digitalis purpurea Dipsacus fullonum Dryopteris filix-mas Epilobium hirsutum

Epilobium montanum

Equisetum arvense

Euphorbia

Fallopia japonica Filipendula ulmaria Galium aparine Geranium dissectum

Geranium robertianum Holcus lanatus Holcus mollis

Hyacinthoides hispanica Hypericum perforatum Impatiens glandulifera

Juncus effusus Juncus inflexus Lamium album Lathyrus pratensis

Leucanthemum vulgare Linaria vulgaris

Lolium perenne Lotus corniculatus

Lupinus polyphyllus Petasites hybridus Phalaris arundinacea Plantago lanceolata Plantago major

Poa pratensis Poa trivialis Populus alba Potentilla reptans Prunus avium

Quercus robur Ranunculus acris Ranunculus repens Reseda luteola

Rubus fruticosus agg. Rumex obtusifolius

Salix caprea

Rosa arvensis

Salix euxina x alba = S. x fragilis

Salix pentandra Sambucus nigra

Scorzoneroides autumnalis

Senecio jacobaea

Stachys

Symphoricarpos albus

Cock's-foot

Tufted Hair-Grass

Foxglove Wild Teasel Male-fern

Great Willowherb

Broad-leaved Willowherb

Field Horsetail

Spurge

Japanese Knotweed Meadowsweet

Cleavers

Cut-leaved Crane's-bill

Herb-Robert Yorkshire-fog Creeping Soft-grass Spanish Bluebell

Perforate St John's-wort

Indian Balsam Soft-rush Hard Rush

White Dead-nettle Meadow Vetchling

Oxeye Daisy Common Toadflax

Perennial Rye-grass

Common Bird's-foot-trefoil

Garden Lupin Butterbur

Reed Canary-grass Ribwort Plantain Greater Plantain Smooth Meadow-grass Rough Meadow-grass

White Poplar

Creeping Cinquefoil

Wild Cherry Pedunculate Oak Meadow Buttercup Creeping Buttercup

Weld Field-rose Bramble

Broad-leaved Dock Goat Willow

Hybrid Crack-willow

Bay Willow Flder

Autumn Hawkbit Common Ragwort

Woundwort Snowberry Tanacetum vulgare Taraxacum officinale agg. Trifolium medium Trifolium pratense Trifolium repens

Tripleurospermum inodorum

Typha latifolia Urtica dioica Vicia sepium

Tansy Dandelion Zigzag Clover **Red Clover** White Clover

Scentless Mayweed

Bulrush

Common Nettle Bush Vetch

Fauna Species List

Scientific Name	Common Name
Lissotriton vulgaris	SmoothNewt
Picus viridis	GreenWoodpecker
Sympetrum sp	Darter