



Aerial photograph showing Alvecote Pools

ALVECOTE POOLS

A SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST (SSSI)

The site consists of a series of shallow pools which have arisen as a result of colliery subsidence. They lie along the course of the River Anker, in North Warwickshire, astride the Warwickshire/Staffordshire border. The site is one of the most extensive and diverse wetland areas in the county and supports a regionally important bird community.

As well as the open waters of the River Anker, the Coventry Canal and the pools themselves, there are a wide variety of other habitats present. These include fen, bog, reed bed, alder/willow carr, scattered woodland, pasture and areas of colliery waste. In the open waters numerous aquatic plants occur including several species of pondweed *Potamogeton spp.* and water crowfoot *Ranunculus spp.* as well as the more unusual greater bladderwort *Utricularia australis*. Marginal vegetation around the ponds varies from marshy swamps, dominated by stands of reedmace *Typha latifolia* and *T. angustifolia* or common reed *Phragmites australis* and reed sweet-grass *Glyceria maxima*, to mixed fenland vegetation with abundant rushes *Juncus spp.*, sedges *Carex spp.* and yellow iris *Iris pseudacorus* with moderate numbers of southern marsh-orchids *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*. The pools are surrounded by a mixture of grassland and scrub.

In the area known as Pooley Fields there has been extensive colonisation of colliery spoil by many mosses, liverworts, fungi and lichens, several of which are rare in the Midlands. A great variety of aquatic and terrestrial invertebrates live in and around these diverse wetland communities. These include land and water bugs (89 species recorded), beetles (322), dragonflies (13) and spiders (121).

Alvecote Pools attracts between 115 and 126 different species of bird every year and of these, 60 to 70 species breed. Breeding water birds include up to 25 pairs each of great crested grebe and tufted duck as well as pochard, shelduck, and little ringed plover. Grasshopper, sedge and reed warblers are found in surrounding reeds and scrub with snipe and redshank in the adjacent grasslands. In the autumn a herd of moulting mute swans is present and has numbered up to 200 but now averages 115 individuals. Several thousand hirundines roost at Alvecote on autumn passage and the pools are an important overwintering ground for large numbers of waterfowl and waders.

The site has one of the most extensive species lists for plants and animals, collected over many years, in the West Midlands.