

SLAPTON LEY NNR

2017-2026: Confirmed Priority Site of National Importance

A large natural freshwater lagoon, separated from the sea by a shingle bar. The eutrophic water has extensive reedswamp fringes and supports a south-westerly outpost of Hairy Dragonfly. Multiple sightings of Norfolk Hawker in 2022, with mating, egg-laying and up to 9 adults seen, and in 2023-24. Ruddy Darter has been seen, but not thought to be breeding. Single record of Scarce Chaser also in 2022, a potential breeder.

Last updated: 23/03/2025

Site: SLAPTON LEY NNR	1987-1996			1997-2006			2007-2016			2017-2026		
Grid ref.: SX825440	Breeding		Other	Breeding		Other	Breeding		Other	Breeding		Other
	Succ	Poss		Succ	Poss		Succ	Poss		Succ	Poss	
<u>Damselflies</u>												
Beautiful Demoiselle			C	A		A			D			C
Banded Demoiselle			B			C			B			
Emerald Damselfly												
White-legged Damselfly												
Large Red Damselfly			E			D			D			A
Blue-tailed Damselfly		B	E			F	B	B	D		B	D
Scarce Blue-t Damselfly												
Common Blue Damselfly	D	A	E	B		D	C	C	D	D	C	E
Southern Damselfly												
Azure Damselfly		C	E			E			D		A	D
Red-eyed Damselfly												
Small Red-eyed Damselfly												A
Small Red Damselfly												
<u>Dragonflies</u>												
Hairy Dragonfly			C	B	A	C	A		C			B
Common Hawker									?			
Norfolk Hawker										A	A	C
Brown Hawker												
Southern Hawker			C			A			B			A
Migrant Hawker		A	C			C			C	A	B	C
Emperor Dragonfly			B	A		B	A		C	C		C
Lesser Emperor												A
Vagrant Emperor												A
Golden-ringed Dragonfly			B			A			C			A
Downy Emerald												
Broad-bodied Chaser			+				B		C			C
Scarce Chaser												A
Four-spotted Chaser												
Keeled Skimmer												
Black-tailed Skimmer			C	A		B		A	D	B	B	D
Common Darter			C			C		B	C	A		C
Red-veined Darter												
Ruddy Darter						A			?			
Black Darter												
Yellow-winged Darter												
Scarlet Darter												
Total species in category:	1	4	14	5	1	14	5	4	14	6	6	18

Bold underlined = nationally important species **Bold black** = important species

Succ = Successful breeding (exuvia(e) and/or larva(e) and/or pre-flight emergent and/or oviposition);
Poss = Possible breeding (copulating pair); Other = Adult(s) or unspecified.

Abundance codes: A=1; B=2-5; C=6-20; D=21-100; E=101-500; F=>500; + = no count.

Priority Species History

Hairy Dragonfly – noted 1978 and 1987-88; at least two territorial males on 1/6/91; two on 23/5/93; at least two males and one female by the Higher Ley in 1994; in 1995, a maximum of six noted on 21/5/95; after 1 reported in 2003, there were up to 2 in May 2004, 4 (including a pair *in cop.*) on 11/6/05 and 1 on 2/7/05; on 12/5/06, 1 adult was at the Lower Ley and 2 exuviae, 1 with a newly-emerged adult, were found at the Higher Ley; in 2008, 1-2 were seen between 6 May and 11 June; an exuvia was found on 20/5/10 and six adults on 14/5/11; 2+ on 26/5/23.

Norfolk Hawker – up to nine adults seen during June-July 2022, with mating and egg-laying seen; it is likely that colonisation went unseen in 2020. In 2023, singles were seen near Slapton Bridge on 28 May and at the southern end of the Lower Ley in a garden at Torcross on the 30th, followed by five near Slapton Bridge on 2 June and about 12 in the same area on 13 June. In 2024, individuals were near the southern end of the Ley at Stokeley Farm in June, suggesting further spread; up to three were at the Ley in June-July, with a late individual up to 16 August.

Scarce Chaser – a male photographed on 16/7/22; a male on 12/8/24.

Ruddy Darter – two presumed migrant males on 28/8/55 and one male on 25/8/03.

Other notable species

Banded Demoiselle – Slapton is notable as being the only known (presumed breeding) site for this species between the Exe and the Tamar; the most likely breeding site is the lower Gara above the Higher Ley.

Small Red-eyed Damselfly – a male photographed on 16/7/22.

Lesser Emperor – single males on 10/7/19, 2/8/21 and 12-16/8/24.

Vagrant Emperor – one on 23/4/23.

Keeled Skimmer – the only record is of a (presumed immigrant) male caught on 7/8/55.

Red-veined Darter – one was seen on 17-18/8/84.

Yellow-winged Darter – recorded in SX84, the hectad containing Slapton Ley, in 1955.

Doubtful records

Common Hawker – due to the difficulties of separating this species and Migrant Hawker, and the misconceptions that the vernacular name brings, it is possible that records on 18/8/97 and 11/9/09 were misidentifications.

Ruddy Darter – reports of singles on 4/10/11 and 26/8/12, two on 18/9/12 and six on 30/10/12 cannot be verified (October records are very unusual).

Habitat (from 1995 survey)

A coastal freshwater lagoon fed by rivers and streams, separated from the sea by a shingle ridge. The northern 'Higher Ley' is dominated by reedbed with a variety of fen and carr vegetation. The 'Lower Ley' is open water, almost entirely fringed by reed, with an area of rich fen along the Start Stream valley to the west, some bare beaches to the NW and large rafts of *Nymphaea alba* at the southern end. Ph: 8.1-8.5, locally higher (water chemistry of the Ley has been well studied by Slapton Field Centre and others). Key to map at end:

1. Inlet stream down valley of fen and marsh and scrubby wetland.
2. Inlet stream down wooded/scrubby fen/reed valley.
3. Higher Ley – reedbed with occasional pools, willow carr and channel through to Lower Ley.
4. Inlet and pool at north of Lower Ley surrounded by tall reed and other tall marginals (plus a very little scrub). Clear water with much submerged vegetation. Fish abundant.
5. Grazed stretch of banks bare 'gravelly' banks (good for basking *O. cancellatum*) with occasional patches of marginal vegetation. Backed by trees.
6. Open water of Lower Ley. Large rafts of aquatic vegetation visible (blanketweed and submerged pondweed).
7. East of causeway – reedbed.
8. West of causeway – fen/marsh with small open pools near the causeway itself.
9. Tributary stream in small wetland valley of tall fen-like vegetation.
10. Ley margins – fairly thick fringes of reed.
11. Upper Ley – open water (many waterfowl).
12. Small fen-like area on inlet stream.
13. Southern end – *Nymphaea* abundant.

14. Margin of reed/*Typha*, tall herbs and grasses.

Status

SSSI, NNR

Area

ca. 130 ha

Owner/tenant

Wild Planet Trust (formerly Whitley Wildlife Conservation Trust) and private landowners.

Local Authority: South Hams DC

Threats

- Excessive eutrophication and siltation.

Management suggestions

- Retain open channels and pools within reedswamp.
- Control nutrient inflow.

SLAPTON LEY.

- ① Inlet stream down valley of fen and marsh and scrubby wetland
- ② Inlet stream down wooded/scrubby fen/reed valley.
- ③ Upper ley - reedbed with occasional pools and channel into main ley
- ④ Inlet and pool at north of main ley surrounded by tall reed and other tall marginals. (plus a very little scrub) Clear water with much submerged vegetation. Fish abundant.
- ⑤ Grazed stretch of banks bare 'gravelly' banks (good for basking O. can.) with occasional patches of marginal veg. Backed by trees.
- ⑥ Open water of ley. At very low water levels, large 'rafts' of aquatic veg: visible (algae or other subm. weed)
- ⑦ East of causeway - reedbed.
- ⑧ West of causeway - fen/marsh with small open pools near the causeway itself.
- ⑨ Tributary stream in small wetland valley of tall fen-like veg.
- ⑩ ley margins - fairly thick fringes of reed
- ⑪ Main ley - deep open water. (many waterfowl)
- ⑫ Small fenny area on inlet stream.
- ⑬ Southern end - Nymphaea abundant
- ⑭ strip of tall herbs and grasses

--- survey 'route'

pHs 8.1 - 8.5

10.3 in 'summy' bit around ⑤.

