

SITE CITATION AND HISTORY

SITE NAME: *Coton Orchard*

Site Code: *Parish(es): Coton, South Cambridgeshire*

Status: *Grid ref: TL415590*

Area (ha): *19.12* **Date selected:** *17th October 2023*

Current Qualifying Criteria

- 1i Traditional Orchard

Historical Qualifying Criteria

Site Description

Planted in 1922 as a commercial orchard it was sold in 1996 and has since been managed as a low-intensity traditional orchard with a view to preserve its heritage, ecological value and provide opportunities for the local community. The site is one of the largest traditional orchards in England and lies just outside the city boundary of Cambridge.

The oldest trees are some of the original Bramley plantings, 12 of which have been listed on the Ancient Tree Inventory, and one of which is the second largest to have ever been recorded in the British Isles. The majority of the other trees are well over 30 years in age as few have been planted since the current family took on ownership, the family wished for the orchard to age as a habitat. 45 varieties of apple have been identified by the East of England Apple and Orchards Project (EEAOP), including Chiver's Delight and Barnack Beauty, both varieties of local significance. Eight types of plums are present including the local variety Cambridge Gage, and five types of pear. The orchard used to grow raspberries and grapes, but these areas have now been reverted to long grass. The majority of trees show some signs of age, including rot holes, loose bark, dead branches and signs of invertebrate activity, plus some water pockets, moss and lichen. Pruning has been done using the local traditional technique of an open canopy and a short stem and this is a continuing practice.

A variety of habitats are present within the site. In the open areas where most of the fruit trees grow, the grass, though species-poor, is left long throughout the summer months and cut in the autumn before harvest, but with some areas left long over winter to provide habitat for invertebrates and small mammals; the areas where soft fruit and grapes were grown are also managed in this way. Between the compartments of the orchard are lines of trees, mostly Poplar *Populus* sp., in which some pipistrelles *Pipistrellus* sp. are known to roost. Lesser-spotted Woodpecker *Sylvia curruca* nest high in the Alder *Alnus* sp. trees along the boundary with Rectory

Farm and Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* is frequently seen in the hedgerow adjacent to the allotments.

The south-eastern part of the site has been neglected as an orchard and left to develop into dense scrub mostly comprising of stands of Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* and Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* plus some areas of young Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*; it is well used by many bird species including wintering Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*. Cutting through the scrub is a wayleave for overhead wires providing an open grassland area with some scattered scrub and a soft gradation from open grass to the dense scrub. This is ideal habitat for birds such as Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* and Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* which have both been recorded on site. At the very south-eastern corner is a stand of mature conifer of several varieties including fir *Abies* sp. and spruce *Picea* sp. which were planted as excess Christmas tree stock and now provide additional habitat interest for birds such as Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*.

Species of conservation interest recorded on the site in the past five years include 14 red-listed birds (including Lesser-spotted Woodpecker, Turtle Dove, Spotted Flycatcher and Woodcock), of which 8 are included in the local Biodiversity Action Plan; 14 amber-listed birds (including Grey Wagtail, Greenshank and Oystercatcher), of which 2 are listed on the local Biodiversity Action Plan; 14 Nationally Scarce invertebrates, plus 11 of local significance (including Large Fruit Bark Beetle, Shothole Borer and Woodcarving Leaf-cutter Bee) plus the Small Heath which is red-listed as Vulnerable [to extinction]; Western Barbastelle and Nathusius' Pipistrelle (foraging).

Coton Orchard CWS Boundary Map

for WSP

1:4,000

29th October 2025

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The Manor House
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