

File ref:

**County:** Hampshire  
**Meadows SSSI**

**Site Name:** Foxlease and Ancells

**Status:** Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981

**Local Planning Authority:** Hampshire County Council, Hart District Council

**National Grid Reference:** SU 831568

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:** 186                      **1:10,000:** SU 85 NW

**Area:** 70.54 (ha) 174.31 (ac)

**Date Notified (Under 1949 Act):** –                      **Date of Last Revision:** –

**Date Notified (Under 1981 Act):** 9 February 1988                      **Date of Last Revision:** –

**Confirmed:** 3 November 1988

**Other Information:**

Major part of the site is owned by the Ministry of Defence.

**Reasons for Notification:**

The Site of Special Scientific Interest comprises a wide range of acid grassland, wet heath and mire plant communities on slowly permeable soils developed in the Bracklesham Beds of the Thames Basin. The area is divided into fields, and its plant communities have probably been much modified by a history of light grazing which has tended to increase species diversity at the expense of what may once have been more extensive wet or humid heathland.

The meadows comprise mainly species-rich, damp, acidic grassland, often dominated by sedges and herbaceous plants. Meadow thistle *Cirsium dissectum*, devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis* and sneezewort *Achillea ptarmica* are particularly abundant, together with carnation sedge *Carex panicea* and common sedge *C. nigra*. The heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens* is sometimes the only grass present in the herb-rich sward, while in wetter areas purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* is dominant. The grassland grades locally into communities dominated by bog mosses *Sphagnum* species and marsh pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, with cottongrass *Eriophorum angustifolium*; together forming a zonation of which there are few other examples in southern England. The site also includes a small area of rabbit-grazed dry, acidic grassland in which there are abundant ant-hills. This community is dominated by red fescue *Festuca rubra* and brown bent-grass *Agrostis canina*, with heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile*, mouse-ear hawkweed *Hieracium pilosella* and heath speedwell *Veronica officinalis*. Locally, the grassland forms a mosaic with bell heather *Erica cinerea* and the associated parasitic common dodder *Cuscuta epithymum*.

There are extensive areas of wet heath dominated by purple moor-grass, cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix* and heather *Calluna vulgaris*. In places, there are also extensive stands of bog myrtle *Myrica gale* in association with these species. Petty whin *Genista anglica* is very common and other species include common lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica* and heath spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza maculata*. In wetter areas, the heathland forms a mosaic with mire communities containing abundant bog moss (especially *Sphagnum papillosum* and *S. tenellum*) and bog asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum*.

The site contains a number of ponds and ditches supporting a diverse flora, including probably the largest population of water violet *Viola palustris* in Hampshire and the nationally declining marsh stitchwort *Stellaria palustris*, which is found at only one other locality in the county. Bog pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*, intermediate-leaved sundew *Drosera intermedia* and marsh St John's-wort *Hypericum elodes* are all abundant, and the scarce white sedge *Carex curta*, cyperus sedge *C. pseudocyperus* and marsh cinquefoil *Potentilla palustris* are also present. The open water habitats are important breeding sites for dragonflies, including the rare small red damselfly *Ceriagrion tenellum*.

A large area of suitable habitat is available for the marsh fritillary butterfly and the site supports several large colonies. This butterfly is rapidly declining throughout Europe due to habitat destruction and is at the eastern limit of its British range in north Hampshire. The Foxlease and Ancells Meadows population is probably an important reservoir for other, more ephemeral, colonies in the area. The abundance of its foodplant, devil's-bit scabious, and a light grazing regime are important factors.

The range of habitats which comprise the SSSI form an ecosystem of great diversity, reflected by the fact that more than 240 plant species have been recorded, including at least 17 species of sedge. Many of the plants which are present have become scarce nationally due to drainage and other agricultural improvements.