

SITE NOTIFIED TO SECRETARY OF STATE ON 22 AUGUST 1986

COUNTY: DORSET SITE NAME: DRAKENORTH

DISTRICT: WEST DORSET

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

Local Planning Authority: WEST DORSET DISTRICT COUNCIL, Dorset County Council

National Grid Reference: SY 527980 Area: 27.2 (ha.) 67.2 (ac.)
SY 531977

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 194 1:10,000: SY 59 NW

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986 Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Within Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

New site.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Drakenorth supports rich grassland communities on predominantly south-facing slopes. Fullers Earth Clay underlies most of the site but in the extreme north there is Upper Greensand and Gault Clay and the character of the soils of the upper slopes is somewhat complicated by landslips. The lower lying areas hold seepages, mostly of base-rich character and there are several streams in deeply incised wooded ravines.

Whilst there are large stands of Common Gorse *Ulex europaeus*, damp mildly calcareous grassland is the main community of the open areas on the Fullers Earth. Here several grasses are abundant including Common and Creeping Bents *Agrostis capillaris* and *A. stolonifera*, Crested Dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, Heath Grass *Danthonia decumbens* and Meadow Fescue *Festuca pratensis*. Glaucous Sedge *Carex flacca* is a prominent constituent and these swards are often very rich in herbs with Oxeye Daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, Creeping Cinquefoil *Potentilla reptans*, Agrimony *Agrimonia eupatoria*, Wild Carrot *Daucus carota*, Cowslip *Primula veris*, Fleabane *Pulicaria dysenterica* and Hoary Ragwort *Senecio erucifolius* frequently in abundance. Pepper Saxifrage *Silaum silaus*, Corky Fruited Water Dropwort *Oenanthe pimpinelliodes*, Zigzag Clover *Trifolium medium*, Dyer's Greenweed *Genista tinctoria* and Adder's Tongue Fern *Ophlogiossum vulgatum*, all local plants in the county, are also well represented in this grassland. Damp acid areas on the Fullers Earth support grassland of a rather different character containing Meadow Thistle *Cirsium dissectum*, Heath Spotted Orchid *Dactylorhiza maculata* and Devil's-bit *Succisa*

pratensis. Dry acid grassland influenced by the Upper Greensand, dominated by Common Bent, contains Heath Bedstraw *Galium saxatile*, Pignut *Conopodium majus* and Mouse-ear Hawkweed *Hieracium pilosella* amongst its herbs.

In the seepages there are stands of Bushgrass *Calamagrostis epigejos* and elsewhere in these wet areas Hard Rush *Juncus inflexus* and Yellow Flag *Iris pseudacorus* form the dominant vegetation. Associated plants here include Ragged Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, Common Spotted Orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, Water Mint *Mentha aquatica* and Bog Pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*.

Wet woodland containing Common Sallow *Salix cinerea*, Alder *Alnus glutinosa* and small amounts of Aspen *Populus tremulus* lines the water courses and drier woodland on higher ground and on the banks of the ravines is mainly of Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur*, Field Maple *Acer campestre* and Hazel *Corylus avellana*. The woodland has a varied ground flora including Wood Anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, Moschatel *Adoxa moschatellina*, Common Violet *Viola riviniana*, Wood Sorrel *Oxalis acetosella* with Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* in the wetter areas. There is a luxuriant growth of lichens on the trees and *Usnea articulata*, a very pollution-sensitive lichen confined to the south-west of the country, occurs.

The fauna of this site has not been extensively studied. The varied habitats including plentiful scrub hold good populations of the commoner birds and the gorse supports breeding Stonechat *Saxicola torquata* a local bird in Dorset away from the heaths and coast. Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* and Merlin *Falco columbarius* are also recorded as wintering species. Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary *Boloria selene*, a local and declining butterfly breeds here. A pond in the north of the site supports good numbers of several species of dragonfly and amphibians.