

NOTIFIED TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE ON 8 FEBRUARY 1989

COUNTY: DORSET/DEVON      SITE NAME: LAMBERT'S CASTLE

DISTRICT: WEST DORSET/EAST DEVON

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

Local Planning Authority: DORSET COUNTY COUNCIL, West Dorset District Council, Devon County Council, East Devon District Council

National Grid Reference: SY 368987      Area: 106.0 (ha.) 261.9 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 193      1:10,000: SY 39 NE, ST 30 SE

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

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

Other Information:

A new site.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Lying between the Marshwood Vale to the east and the Axe Vales to the west, the site features a prominent landmark consisting of a flat-topped hill with an Iron Age hill fort from which it takes its name. Together with its flanks and adjacent lower slopes, which extend into Devon, this site comprises a range of grasslands and associated habitats which are now both rare and threatened nationwide. Its geology is characteristic of the hill and vale country of the Dorset/Devon borders, being dominated by the sands and marls of the Middle Lias, with remains of an unconformable capping of Gault and Upper Greensand. These geological conditions profoundly influence the ecology of the remaining areas of semi-natural vegetation, with an important feature being the strong outflow of springs from the junction of the Upper Greensand and Gault.

The plateau surface and steep slopes of the Upper Greensand are largely dominated by a mosaic of acidic grassland, open heath, scrub and secondary woodland. The acidic grassland has frequent Sheep's-fescue *Festuca ovina*, Sweet Vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, Early Hair-grass *Aira praecox*, Heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens* and Field Wood-rush *Luzula campestris*. Herbs present include abundant Tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, Heath Milkwort *Polygala serpyllifolia*, Cat's-ear *Hypochoeris radicata* and Heath Bedstraw *Galium saxatile*. On the steep, flinty upper sections of east and south-facing slopes open heath persists, dominated by Heather *Calluna vulgaris* with less abundant Bell Heather *Erica cinerea*, Bristle Bent *Agrostis curtisii* and locally some Bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*. Open areas have a good cover of bryophytes and lichens. This heathland community has a greater affinity with those of East Devon than the heathland areas of South-east Dorset. Associated with these steep slopes are islands and continuous blocks of scrub, with

abundant Gorse *Ulex europaeus* and Western Gorse *U. gallii* amongst Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* and Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*. In places this community has developed a stage further to secondary woodland of Birch *Betula* spp. with occasional Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, Rowan *Sorbus aucuparia* and Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur*.

At the base of the Upper Greensand, where it adjoins the Gault, is a spring line which has led to the formation of a zone of acidic bog vegetation, this being best developed at Fishpond Bottom. The richest areas are lightly grazed and stock trampled with a sward composed of low tussocks of Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* interspersed with Common Cottongrass *Eriophorum angustifolium* and Sedges *Carex* spp. including Star Sedge *C. echinata*, Green-ribbed Sedge *C. binervis* and Flea Sedge *C. pulicaris*; these areas contain abundant Bog Moss *Sphagnum* spp. Frequent among the many herbs present are Heath Spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza maculata*, Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis*, Bog Asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum*, Marsh Violet *Viola palustris* and Meadow Thistle *Cirsium dissectum*. Several species of very restricted distribution are also found here including Wood Horsetail *Equisetum sylvaticum*, Lesser Butterfly-orchid *Platanthera bifolia* and the predominantly western Pale Butterwort *Pinguicula lusitanica*.

The lower slopes to the south and east, and extending into Devon to the west, support areas of agriculturally-unimproved and herb-dominated neutral grassland. This grassland largely conforms to the community type typified by Crested Dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* and Common Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*. Many species of grass and sedge are present including Red Fescue *Festuca rubra*, Yellow Oat-grass *Trisetum flavescens* and Quaking Grass *Briza media*, with Spring-sedge *C. caryophyllea* and Glaucous Sedge *C. flacca* being widely distributed. Of the numerous herbs, Red Clover *Trifolium pratense*, Oxeye Daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare* and Common Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* are constant throughout. The character and composition of the individual fields is dependant upon their soil conditions and management regime, with this variation reflected in the distribution of some of the less frequent species such as Lady's-mantle *Alchemilla vulgaris*, Dyer's Greenweed *Genista tinctoria* and Corky-fruited Water-dropwort *Oenanthe pimpinelloides*, a species largely confined to central-southern England. Adder's-tongue *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, an indicator of old grassland, is present locally.

Within the grassland community there are frequent areas of impeded drainage containing much Soft and Sharp-flowered Rush *Juncus effusus* and *J. acutiflorus* and frequent sedge species such as Oval Sedge *C. ovalis*, Common Yellow-sedge *C. demissa* and Carnation Sedge *C. panicea*. The degree of base-enrichment greatly influences the relative abundance of these and the herb species present which typically include Common Marsh-bedstraw *Galium palustre*, Marsh Pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, Ragged-Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus uliginosus* and Bog Pimpernel *Anagallis tenella* as well as the local Bristle Club-rush *Isolepis setacea*.

Further habitat and structural diversity are provided by areas of open and flowing water, pockets of woodland and carr and a significant length of old hedgerow with many mature trees on the hedgebanks. These habitats and communities support a rich and varied fauna, including several species of invertebrate with a scattered or very

local distribution, such as the Glow-worm *Lampyris noctiluca*. Two of the rarer butterfly species recorded for the site include the nationally scarce and rapidly declining Pearl-bordered and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary *Boloria selene* and *B. euphrosyne*.