

SITE NOTIFIED TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE ON 30 OCTOBER 1992

COUNTY: DORSET SITE NAME: MAPPERTON AND POORTON
VALES

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: DORSET COUNTY COUNCIL, West Dorset District
Council

National Grid Reference: SY 510990 Area: 85.64 (ha.) 211.62 (ac.)

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

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1992 Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

New site. Within West Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Part is Dorset Trust for Nature Conservation Reserve.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Comprising a series of remote West Dorset valleys of striking landscape, Mapperton and Poorton Vales has diverse nature conservation interest. Streams have cut steep-sided valleys, the floors of which are occupied by wet woodland, fen or marshy grassland. These wet valley bottoms provide outstanding habitat for invertebrates and support a rich fauna including many rare and nationally scarce species. Some of the valley slopes have been relatively little modified by agricultural improvement and retain floristically interesting grassland of several types which are now of restricted distribution both nationally and in Dorset.

The Bridport and Yeovil sands which dominate the geology of the area support unimproved acidic grassland of the Sheep's Fescue *Festuca ovina* – Common Bent *Agrostis capillaris* – death Bedstraw *Galium saxatile* community type. The short grazed turf, while naturally species-poor, includes the herbs Tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, Heath Speedwell *Veronica officinalis* and Common Dog-violet *Viola riviniana*. It has a well developed bryophyte (mosses and liverworts) component. Anthills are a conspicuous feature and provide a different habitat for mosses as well as other plants such as Sheep's Sorrel *Rumex acetosella* and Early Hair Grass *Aira praecox*.

In places, localised outcrops of Inferior Oolitic limestone have a calcareous influence on the grassland, reflected by the presence of the Sheep's Fescue *Festuca ovina* – Meadow Oat Grass *Avenula pratensis* community type. A range of small herbs occurs including Wild Thyme *Thymus praecox*, Mouse-ear Hawkweed *Hieracium pilosella*,

Salad Burnet *Sanguisorba minor* and Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, together with Lady's Bedstraw *Galium verum* and Small Scabious *Scabiosa columbaria*.

Fuller's Earth clay mantles the gentler slopes to the north where species-rich neutral grassland of the Crested Dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* – Common Knapweed *Centaurea nigra* community type occurs. This community has an attractive diversity of flowering plants such as Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis*, Betony *Stachys officinalis*, Ox-eye Daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, Pignut *Conopodium majus* and the nationally scarce Corky-fruited Water Dropwort *Oenanthe pimpinelloides*.

The woodland of the valley bottoms is predominantly a mixture of unmanaged Hazel *Corylus avellana* and Alder *Alnus glutinosa* coppice under an Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur* canopy, with Grey Willow *Salix cinerea* and Alder carr in wetter places. Aspen *Populus tremula* and Holly *Ilex aquifolium* occur locally. Characteristic herbs are Wood Sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*, Ramsons *Allium ursinum*, Bluebell *Endymion non-scriptus*, Wood Spurge *Euphorbia amygdaloides* and Yellow Archangel *Lamiastrum galeobdolon*. Particularly associated with the Alder carr is Tussock Sedge *Carex paniculata* and the local Alternate-leaved Golden-saxifrage *Chrysosplenium alternifolium*.

Interspersed amongst the woodland and carr are several small wet meadows and areas of ungrazed fen in which rushes *Juncus* spp., Great Horsetail *Equisetum telmateia* and tall herbs such as Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, Wild Angelica *Angelica sylvestris* and Yellow Iris *Iris pseudacorus* are prominent. Frequent associates include Marsh Orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*, Marsh Valerian *Valeriana dioica*, Fen Bedstraw *Galium uliginosum* and Marsh Marigold *Caltha palustris*.

The broad range of closely juxtaposed habitats in these valleys has resulted in a rich invertebrate fauna whose interest centres mainly on the fen, seepages, stream margins and carr woodland. Diptera (true flies) are particularly well represented with four Red Data Book* and 20 nationally scarce species. The crane fly *Scleroprocta pentagonalis*, the snail-killing fly *Antichaeta brevipennis*, the soldier fly *Oxycera analis* and the robber fly *Dioctria cothurnata* are all Red Data Book species restricted to wet woodland or shaded fen. The carr also supports at least six nationally scarce crane flies. Most of the other scarce flies are found in open or shaded fen or seepages and include three semi-aquatic soldier flies *Oxycera pardalina*, *Stratiomys potamida* and *Vanoyia tenuicornis*, and the snail-killing fly *Colobaea distincta*. Trampled stream margins are the habitat of the dung fly *Themira gracilis*, a species previously recorded mainly from northern Britain.

At least seven further nationally scarce invertebrates are known from this site, of which six are beetles. Two species of leaf beetle, *Cassida murraea* and *Chrysolina menthastri*, are associated with marshy areas, while dead wood supports the longhorn beetle *Judolia cerambyciformis* and soldier beetle *Malthodes guttifer* as well as the fly *Oedalea tibialis*. The weevil *Cneorhinus plumbeus* and the wolf spider *Pardosa agrestis* are associated with dry grassland.

* The Red Data Book is a listing of rare and threatened insects.