

COUNTY: DORSET SITE NAME: AUNT MARY'S BOTTOM

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: ST 546023 Area: 8.62 (ha.) 21.3 (ac.)

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

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1991 Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

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

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Aunt Mary's Bottom is a valley mire lying on the northern flank of Rampisham Hill. It was formed by the headwaters of a tributary of the River Frome cutting through the Lower Chalk and Upper Greensand to the underlying Gault Clay. Fed by base-rich seepage water, a shallow peat mire has developed on the clay and supports fen meadow vegetation and Alder carr woodland. There are associated areas of dry and marshy acidic grassland. It is an undamaged and rich example of a very restricted habitat. The rich and diverse plant communities provide habitat for a large invertebrate fauna of great rarity and scientific interest.

The fen meadow vegetation largely comprises tall sedges, rushes and herbs, with Greater Tussock Sedge *Carex paniculata* locally dominant. Hairy Sedge *Carex hirta*, Common Sedge *Carex nigra*, Jointed Rush *Juncus articulatus* and Great Horsetail *Equisetum telmateia* are frequent. Locally, Brown Sedge *Carex disticha* and stands of Blunt-flowered Rush *Juncus subnodulosus* indicate the calcareous nature of the mire. Species rare in Dorset which occur here include Broad-leaved Cottongrass *Eriophorum latifolium* and Few-flowered Spike-rush *Eleocharis quinqueflora*.

The tall herbs characteristic of this community include Marsh Thistle *Cirsium palustre*, Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, Wild Angelica *Angelica sylvestris* and Hemp Agrimony *Eupatorium cannabinum*. Occasionally Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis* and Water Figwort *Scrophularia auriculata* are prominent. The rich flora also includes many typical wetland species amongst which Water Mint *Mentha aquatica*, Water Avens *Geum rivale*, Hybrid Avens *Geum x intermedium*, Marsh Marigold *Caltha palustris*, Marsh Valerian *Valeriana dioica*, Ragged Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi* and Greater Bird's-foot-

trefoil *Lotus uliginosus* are representative. Marsh Helleborine *Epipactis palustris*, which is uncommon in Dorset, also occurs here.

The woodland, which covers a substantial proportion of the site, is mainly carr of Alder *Alnus glutinosa* and Grey Willow *Salix cinerea* with wet seepages and small streams, and higher, drier ground bearing Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur*. The ground flora reflects the varying conditions and includes many of the species seen in the fen meadows together with other plants characteristic of a long history of woodland cover. These include Lady fern *Athyrium filix-femina*, Ramsons *Allium ursinum*, Bluebell *Endymion non-scriptus*, Wood Anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, Wood Sorrel *Oxalis acetosella* and Wood Speedwell *Veronica montana*. Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* and Remote Sedge *Carex remota* are locally abundant. The site has a distinctive bryophyte flora, including the local mosses *Cratoneuron commutatum* and *Climacium dendroides* and the liverwort *Trichocolea tomentella*.

The base-rich character of the mire has resulted in an entomological fauna different from that of other fen and carr sites in West Dorset. Thirteen species are nationally scarce and one of these, the birch-feeding sawfly *Nematus brevipalpis*, has provisional Red Data Book* status. Two of the scarce species are flies new to Britain, *Platypalpus biapicalis* and *Erioptera flavissima*. The site has a good representation of species associated with carr, fen and stream margins. The fen is important for the scarce flies *Rhaphium auctum*, *Anagnota bicolor* and *Oxycera pardalina*, and the carr and seepages are the larval sites for the scarce flies *Molophilus corniger*, *Thaumastoptera calceata* and *Sapromyza albiceps*. Also dependent on the wet habitats are the scarce crane fly *Pilaria fuscipennis* and soldier fly *Beris fuscipes*. Two species of interest associated with dead wood are the scarce beetle *Malthodes guttifer* and the local crane fly *Lipsothrix nervosa* which is thought to be endemic to Britain. The scarce weevil *Gymnetron melanarium* has also been recorded here.

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