

Site Notified to Secretary of State on 15th April 1986

**County:** Dorset **Site Name:** Townsend

**District:** Purbeck

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

**Local Planning Authority:** Purbeck District Council, Dorset County Council

**National Grid Reference:** SZ 023782 **Area:** 14.2 (ha) 35.1 (ac)

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:** 195 **1:10,000:** SZ 07 NW

**Date Notified (Under 1949 Act):** 1977 **Date of Last Revision:** –

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

**Other Information:**

Part Dorset Trust for Nature Conservation Reserve. Site boundary amended by extension and deletion. Site formerly known as Townsend Farm Quarries.

**Description and Reasons for Notification:**

Lying on Jurassic limestone of the Purbeck Beds, Townsend supports calcareous grassland and scrub. The area was formerly quarried for Purbeck stone and the underground galleries and associated quarry entrances provide important winter roosting sites for bats, including the rare greater horseshoe bat *Rhinolophus ferrum-equinum*.

On the surface, the steep scar banks provide an uneven topography of varying aspect, with thin poor soils supporting a rich downland flora and fauna. Amongst a varied turf which includes sheep's-fescue *Festuca ovina* and quaking-grass *Briza media*, there is an abundance of horseshoe vetch *Hippocrepis comosa*, kidney vetch *Anthyllis vulneria*, yellow-wort *Blackstonia perfoliata*, yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, rue-leaved saxifrage *Saxifraga tridactylites*, and wild thyme *Thymus praecox*. Pyramidal orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, bee orchid *Ophrys apifera* and autumn lady's tresses *Spiranthes spiralis* occur, together with a population of the very rare early spider orchid *Ophrys sphegodes* – a protected species. Two other rare species, early gentian *Gentianella anglica* and bastard toadflax *Thesium humifusum* occur.

Taller swards of limestone grassland are dominated by oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius* and tor-grass *Brachypodium pinnatum*. Associated species here include cowslip *Primula veris*, burnet saxifrage

*Pimpinella saxifraga*, pepper saxifrage *Silaum silaus*, small scabious *Scabiosa columbaria* and common knapweed *Centaurea nigra*.

The taller vegetation supports a wealth of invertebrates including great green bush-cricket *Tettigonia viridissima*, and several species of butterflies including marbled white *Melanargia galathea* and the rare Lulworth skipper *Thymelicus acteon*. Areas of well developed dense mature blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* and hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* scrub provide valuable cover for many migrant and breeding birds including, in some seasons, nightingale *Luscinia megarhyncos*. Old boundary dry stone walls provide further important habitat for a variety of species, particularly invertebrates.