

SITE NOTIFIED TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE ON 12 APRIL 1990

COUNTY: DORSET SITE NAME: UPTON HEATH

DISTRICT: PURBECK, POOLE, EAST DORSET

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, Poole Borough Council, East Dorset District Council, Dorset County Council

National Grid Reference: SY 987945 Area: 215.8 (ha.) 533.2 (ac.)
 SY 977947

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 195 1:10,000: SY 99 SE, 99 NE

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1984 Date of last Revision: 1990

Other Information:

Site boundary amended by extension and deletion. The importance of this site is such that, although not included in 'A Nature Conservation Review' at the time of its publication in 1977, it has nevertheless since been recognised as an integral part of the national series of lowland heathlands.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Although but a part of the previously more extensive Poole Heath, Upton remains one of the largest continuous tracts of heathland in Dorset. Its heathland communities have developed on acid soils derived from Bagshot Beds overlain locally with plateau gravels. The site supports many of the rare plants and animals typically associated with this internationally important habitat.

Much of the heathland is humid or wet with Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* and Cross-leaved Heath *Erica tetralix* the dominant species. Strong populations of the nationally scarce Marsh Gentian *Gentiana pneumonanthe* occur in some of the wetter areas and there is a small stand of the nationally rare Dorset Heath *Erica ciliaris* in one of its most northern and eastern sites. An extensive valley bog forms the main feature of the central part of the site. Here Bog Moss *Sphagnum* spp. carpets are well-developed with a variety of species present including the restricted *S. pulchrum*. Common Cotton-grass *Eriophorum angustifolium* and Bog Asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum* are frequent and Black Bog-rush *Schoenus nigricans* is locally common.

Higher land supports dry heathland of the Western Gorse *Ulex gallii* – Bristle Bent *Agrostis curtisii* type characteristic of heaths in this part of the Poole Basin. Heather *Calluna vulgaris* is dominant with Bell Heather *Erica cinerea*, Western Gorse and Bristle Bent frequent.

Woodland and grassland areas add diversity to the habitat. Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris* in stands of varying density occurs in the drier areas and in a few of the wetter parts woodland, dominated by Grey Willow *Salix cinerea* and Birch *Betula* spp., has developed. A small area of grazed acidic grassland adjoins the heath. Strong populations of two restricted species, Yellow Bartsia *Parentucellia viscosa* and Green-winged Orchid *Orchis morio*, occur here.

The fauna of Upton Heath includes several of the rarer animals associated with heathland in southern Britain: Sand Lizard *Lacerta agilis** and Smooth Snake *Coronella austriaca** are present in good numbers in the drier heathland; Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*^{+\$}, Hobby *Falco subbuteo*⁺ and Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*^{\$} breed in the area; and the site has a number of uncommon heathland invertebrates including the nationally rare Heath Grasshopper *Chorthippus vagans* and the nationally scarce Silver-studded Blue Butterfly *Plebejus argus*, Small Red Damselfly *Ceriagrion tenellum*, Hairy Dragonfly *Brachytron pratense* and Blue-tailed Damselfly *Ishnura pumilio*. The site is outstanding for the range of dragonfly species present with a total of 19 breeding species recorded.

*Species listed in Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

⁺Species listed in Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

^{\$}Species listed in Annex 1 of the EC Bird Directive.