

County: Devon **Site Name:** Morte Point

District: North Devon

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

Local Planning Authority: Devon County Council, North Devon District Council

National Grid Reference: SS 450455 **Area:** 99.0 (ha) 244.6 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 180 **1:10,000:** SS 44 NE, SE, NW (in SW)

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1952 **Date of Last Revision:** 1976

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

Other Information:

Site boundary amended by extension and deletion. In North Devon AONB and Structure Plan Coastal Preservation Area. Owned by National Trust above High Water Mark.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

The site is primarily of interest for its maritime heath, but also displays a variety of coastal, cliff and foreshore habitats.

Morte Point forms the north-west corner of North Devon District. Its flanks face north on to the Bristol Channel and west to the Atlantic Ocean. The cliffs are 50 to 100 m high and the land above rises steeply to some 450 m. There is a variety of Upper Devonian rocks, mainly slates and sandstones, the overlying soils being generally thin and leached.

Heather *Calluna vulgaris*, bell heather *Erica cinerea* and western gorse *Ulex gallii* are abundant over the northern slopes, mixed with grassland and scrub. On steeper slopes there are extensive areas of bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, sometimes intermixed with the heathers; with taller scrub of European gorse *U. europaeus* and blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*. Some of the grassland is dominated by purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* often in tussocks, and there are many ant-hills. In sheltered areas with somewhat richer soil, plants such as primrose *Primula vulgaris* and bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* occur.

On the less-steep grazed land, perennial rye-grass *Lolium perenne*, crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* and cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata* are common. Grasses of the cliffs and exposed areas include red fescue *Festuca rubra* and Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*, while other characteristic species of these areas are thrift *Armeria maritima*, rock samphire *Crithmum maritimum*, wild thyme *Thymus praecox*, common sorrel *Rumex acetosa* and the ribwort and buck's-horn plantains *Plantago lanceolata* and *P. coronopus*. Other common species near the cliff tops are common bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, tormentil *Potentilla erecta* and sheep's-bit *Jasione montana*. Sea heath *Frankenia laevis* has been recorded here.

Sea birds including gulls *Larus* spp. and fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis* breed on the cliffs, with cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* and shag *P. aristotelis* on the lower rocks.