

COUNTY: SOMERSET

SITE NAME: WHITEVINE MEADOWS

DISTRICT: YEOVIL

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

Local Planning Authority: SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL, Yeovil District Council

National Grid Reference: ST 505085 Area: 13.0 (ha.) 32.0 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 194 1:10,000: ST 40 NE, ST 50 NW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1979 Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985 Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:
Site area decreased.

Description:

This site consists of a nationally rare type of neutral grassland together with adjoining areas of scrub and ancient woodland. A number of plants with a local distribution in Somerset also occur.

Occupying the north-facing slopes of Ashland Hill and situated between 50 and 100m OD, the site is underlain by Fuller's Earth, here represented by clays interbedded with thin beds of nodular limestone (the Wattonensis Beds). Weathering of these strata has produced neutral to calcareous soils of the Evesham and Denchworth Associations. The soils are slightly permeable and are liable to seasonal waterlogging.

The traditionally managed meadow supports a species-rich neutral grassland community of the Common Knapweed-Crested Dog's-tail type. 110 species of plant have been recorded in this field to date. Crested Dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, Common Bent *Agrostis capillaris*, Sweet Vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and Red Fescue *Festuca rubra* are the most common grasses. 7 species of orchid have been recorded including Fragrant Orchid *Gymnadenia conopsea*, Early Marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza incarnata*, Heath Spotted-orchid *D. maculata* and Green-winged Orchid *Orchis morio*. Other species present include Fairy Flax *Linum catharticum*, Corky-fruited Water Dropwort *Oenanthe pimpinelloides*, Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis*, Yellow Rattle *Rhinanthus minor* and Pepper-saxifrage *Silaum silaus*.

The Whitevine meadow is unusual in being one of only three British localities (all within SE Somerset) where the grass *Gaudinia fragilis* is a prominent and established component of the sward. This species has hitherto been regarded as an alien in Britain and northern Europe where it occurs in dry stony sites. However, at Whitevine it is a prominent member of the grassland community, occurring in conditions similar to those found in its native habitat. *Gaudinia* may therefore be indigenous to Britain and the Somerset sites are important in helping to analyse the ecology and distribution of this species in Europe.

Small relicts of ancient woodland are dominated by Hazel *Corylus avellana*, with occasional standards of Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur*: while Beech *Fagus sylvatica* borders a stream along the eastern boundary. The ground flora includes Herb Paris *Paris quadrifolia*. Other uncommon plants are

Bird's-nest Orchid *Neottia nidus-avis*, Greater Butterfly-orchid *Platanthera chlorantha* and Adder's-tongue *Ophioglossum vulgatum*.

Dense scrub dominated by Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* and Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* has developed on formerly-cultivated land in the last 100 years. Other shrubs present include the calcium-loving species Privet *Ligustrum vulgare*, Spindle *Euonymus europaeus* and Dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*.

The scrub provides nest sites for several species of bird, including Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*. Clearings within the scrub support a mixed Flora with Saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria*, Yellow-wort *Blackstonia perfoliata* and Autumn Gentian *Gentianella amarella*. These sheltered glades provide favourable climatic conditions for butterflies including Marbled White *Melanargia galathea* and Silver-washed Fritillary *Argynnis paphia*.