

SITE NOTIFIED TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE ON THE 24TH MARCH 1994

COUNTY: DORSET

SITE NAME: BLANDFORD CAMP

DISTRICT: NORTH DORSET

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

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

National Grid Reference: ST 927085

Area: 28.49 (ha.) 70.37 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 195

1:10,000: ST 90 NW

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1994

Description and Reason for Notification:

Blandford Camp lies on the dip slope of the Dorset chalk outcrop two miles north east of Blandford Forum between 75 and 100m above sea level. The site is of special interest for its high quality downland turf which has developed on brown rendzina soils on an exposed and undulating plateau of the upper chalk dissected by dry valleys. The site consists of three grassland blocks, relics of a once continuous expanse of downland across the county, now fragmented by agriculture, development and forestry. The chalk downland at Blandford Camp is unusual in that a substantial area lies on level ground; almost all of the remaining unimproved chalk grassland in Dorset is now confined to steep slopes unsuitable for intensive agriculture.

The most extensive grassland type consists of the richest variant of the sheep's-fescue *Festuca ovina* -- meadow oat-grass *Helictotrichon pratense* community and has developed on both flat and sloping ground. This is characterised by a diverse mixture of grasses, sedges and herbs in which wild thyme *Thymus polytrichus*, squinancywort *Asperula cynanchia* and dwarf thistle *Cirsium acaule* are typically prominent. Two nationally scarce species occur in their largest known Dorset populations on this site: dwarf sedge *Carex humilis* which is the only species to attain local dominance and bastard-toadflax *Thesium humifusum*, frequent on the short sward of the level ground.

The most constantly encountered plants of the downland are salad burnet *Sanguisorba minor*, small scabious *Scabiosa columbaria*, dropwort *Filipendula vulgaris*, rough hawkbit *Leontodon hispidus* and lady's bedstraw *Galium verum*. Glaucous sedge *Carex flacca* is a regular component of the vegetation, together with grasses such as red fescue *Festuca rubra*, sheep's fescue, quaking-grass *Briza media* and smaller cat's-tail *Phleum bertolonii*. Additional species indicative of high quality calcareous grassland occurring at Blandford Camp include horseshoe vetch *Hippocrepis comosa*, large thyme *Thymus pulegioides*, chalk milkwort *Polygala calcarea*, kidney vetch *Anthylis vulneraria*, the local and declining basil thyme *Clinopodium acinos* and the nationally scarce and endemic early gentian *Gentianella anglica*¹. The moss *Pseudoscleropodium purum* forms extensive carpets among the herbage with occasional *Homalothecium lutescens* and *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus*.

The grassland community dominated by upright brome *Bromopsis erecta* forms a mosaic with the community described above and although a feature of the Wiltshire chalk, is extremely scarce in Dorset. The coarser sward contains many of the herbs and grasses described above but taller herbs such as small scabious, wild basil *Clinopodium vulgare*, burnet saxifrage *Pimpinella saxifraga*, cowslip *Primula veris* and fairy flax *Linum catharticum* are more prominent.

The diversity of the site is enhanced by the presence of a structurally and floristically varied scrub community characteristic of the eastern Dorset chalk. Buckthorn *Rhamnus catharticus*, hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and wayfaring-tree *Viburnum lantana* are frequent with scattered traveller's-joy *Clematis vitalba*, dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*, wild privet *Ligustrum vulgare* and hazel *Corylus avellana*. The intimate juxtaposition of scrub, tall and short grassland provides habitat for birds such as whitethroat *Sylvia communis* and yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella* and sheltered areas for invertebrates notably butterflies. The nationally scarce adonis blue *Lysandra bellargus* has been recorded together with dingy skipper *Erynnis tages*, small blue, *Cupido minimus*, brown argus *Aricia agestis*, common blue *Polyommatus icarus* and grizzled skipper *Pyrgus malvae*.

¹ Species listed on Annexe 2 of European Habitats and Species Directive.