COUNTY: Devon SITE NAME: BERRY HEAD TO SHARKHAM POINT

DISTRICT: Torbay

Status: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)
Part covered by The Berry Head and Berry Head (Southern Redoubt) (Areas of Special Protection) Order 1984 under Section 3 of the 1981 Act. Part declared as a Local Nature Reserve under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.

Local Planning Authority: Devon County Council; Torbay Borough Council

National Grid Reference: 937568, SX 947565, 937546 Area: 67.9 (ha) 167.8 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 202 1:10,000: SX 95 NW, SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1952 Date of Last Revision: 1976
Berry Head LNR declared: 1973

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

Other Information:
Boundary amended by extension and deletion. In South Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Part of original Berry Head to Froward Point SSSI.

Description and Reasons for Notification:
This site is important for its extensive area of limestone grassland containing many nationally rare plants and for its important assemblages of lichens. Also, the sea cliffs support the largest Guillemot colony to be found along the south coast of England. In addition, important geological features are to be found at Shoalstone Beach.

Berry Head is a large headland of Devonian-age limestone. Reaching a height of 195 m, it is generally flat-topped, with a series of cliffs, steep slopes and ledges reaching down to the sea. The soils are shallow, well drained and rock exposures are common. The marine caves under Berry Head display a variety of calcite and mud formations and the lower levels are variably flooded with seawater. At Shoalstone Beach the wave cut platform exposes two sets of red sandstone-filled fissures (dykes) some of which are lined with large sparry calcite crystals. The fissures are cut into the Devonian Torquay Limestone and mark the initial stages of continental deposition in the Permo-Triassic basin of south west England on a basement of much older Palaeozoic rocks.

The areas of open grassland and broken cliff support rich and diverse plant communities characteristic of limestone. Species present include the rare White Rock-rose *Helianthemum appenninum*, Portland Spurge *Euphorbia portlandica*, Rock Sea-lavender *Limonium binervosum*, Goldilocks Aster *Aster linosyris* and Rock Stonecrop *Sedum forsterianum*. Areas of short turf also support the rare species Honewort *Trinia glauca*, Small Hare's-ear *Bupleurum baldense* and Small Restharrow *Ononis reclinata*. Several species with a restricted distribution in Devon occur, including Wild Cabbage *Brassica oleracea*, Autumn Squill *Scilla autumnalis* and Bee Orchid *Ophrys apifera*.

Some areas on the plateau support a flora characteristic of acidic conditions. Gorse *Ulex europaeus* and Western Gorse *U. gallii* occur with Heather *Calluna vulgaris* and Bell Heather *Erica cinerea*. Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* and Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* are present in patches and Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* and Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* grow in sheltered places.

A lichen flora typical of limestone is present, with all the major groups represented. The most abundant genus is *Caloplaca* and in areas of short turf *Bacidia muscorum* can be

found whilst patches of bare soil support *Cladonia foliacea* and *Squamarina crassa*. Other lichens of interest include *Rinodina bischoffii* on stable limestone pebbles, *Toninia cervina* in sheltered crevices and *Verrucaria dufourii* on the coastal rocks.

In recent years up to 400 Guillemot *Uria aalge* spp *albionis* have been present on the cliffs, forming the only stable breeding colony of this species on the south coast. Other regularly nesting seabirds include Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*, Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis* and Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*. The flooded marine caves with their wide range of salinity and light conditions have an interesting cave and marine fauna. Some are inhabited by Greater and Lesser Horseshoe Bats *Rhinolophus ferrumequinum* and *R. hipposideros*.