

COUNTY: DORSET      SITE NAME: BRENSCOMBE HEATH

DISTRICT: PURBECK

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

Local Planning Authority: DORSET COUNTY COUNCIL, Purbeck District Council

National Grid Reference: SY 985829      Area: 34.7 (ha.) 85.7 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 195      1:10,000: SY 98 SE

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

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

Other Information:  
New Site.

#### Description and Reasons for Notification:

Brenscombe Heath is one of the larger fragments of the formerly continuous heathland on the Bagshot Beds, south of Poole Harbour. It holds substantial areas of the very local wet heathland community characterised by the presence of Dorset Heath *Erica ciliaris* as well as dry heath, flushes and damp heathy grassland. The fauna of the site contains several rare heathland species.

On the higher ground in the south there is dry heath dominated by Ling *Calluna vulgaris* with Bell Heather *Erica cinerea* and typical heathland lichens, especially *Cladonia portentosa*. Lower-lying land supports humid and wet heathland with Ling, Cross-leaved Heath *Erica tetralix* and the moss *Sphagnum compactum* in the slightly drier areas. Where conditions are wetter, Purple Moor Grass *Molinia caerulea* and the rare and very local Dorset Heath *Erica ciliaris* are abundant, together with Marsh Gentian *Gentiana pneumonanthe*, another rare plant. These lower-lying areas are locally flushed by water from higher ground and here bog mosses including the rare *Sphagnum pulchrum* are the dominant ground cover with White Beak-sedge *Rhynchospora alba*, Bog Asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum* and the sundews *Drosera rotundifolia* and *D. intermedia*. In the south east, where there are well developed flushes with slightly base-rich water, Black Bog Rush *Schoenus nigricans* is frequent.

There are stands of Common Gorse *Ulex europaeus* and a scattering of Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris* on the heathland and birch *Betula* spp. and Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur* on the heathland fringes.

In the north, there is heathy grassland which, dominated by Purple Moor Grass, contains frequent Carnation Sedge *Carex panicea*, Low Sedge *C. demissa* with Dorset Heath and Cross-leaved Heath. Other herbs such as Saw-wort *Serratula*

*tinctoria*, Lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica*, Tormentil *Potentilla erecta* are present and there are fine stands of Marsh Gentian. Adder's-tongue Fern *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, a plant typically of old grassland, also occurs here.

As is typical of many fragments of Dorset Heath, the fauna of Brenscombe Heath includes a number of scarce and localised species. Both of the rare and protected reptiles, the Sand Lizard *Lacerta agilis* and Smooth Snake *Coronella austriaca* occur on the dry areas. The Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata* also breeds on this heath.

The invertebrates have not been well studied but the site supports a rich dragonfly fauna, a group especially well represented on Dorset Heaths and there is a strong population of the local Bog Bush Cricket *Metrioptera Brachyptera*.