

SITE NOTIFIED TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE ON 1 SEPTEMBER 1986

CITATION

COUNTY: DEVON      SITE NAME: SOUTHMOOR FARM

DISTRICT: WEST 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, West Devon Borough Council

National Grid Reference: SS 564003      Area: 28.9 (ha.) 71.4 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 191      1:10,000: SS 50 SE; SX 59 NE

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1987      Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

New site.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Southmoor Farm contains outstanding examples of several herb-rich grassland communities with a restricted distribution in Britain, together with scrub and woodland habitats.

The site, lying at an altitude of 125m, consists of 11 shallowly-sloping fields in a compact cluster on the Carboniferous slates and shales of the Culm Measures. The soils are clayey, acidic to neutral, and are poorly drained.

Most of the fields have acidic soils, supporting plant communities typical of the Culm Measures. These contain abundant Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, Meadow Thistle *Cirsium dissectum* and Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis*, together with frequent Glaucous, Carnation, Tawny and Flea Sedges *Carex flacca*, *C. panicea*, *C. hostiana* and *C. pulicaris* among many other species. A particularly notable and attractive feature of these fields is the occurrence of numerous Heath Spotted-orchids *Dactylorhiza maculata* and Lesser Butterfly-orchids *Platanthera bifolia*, the latter being nationally scarce. On better drained ground the sward contains much Heather *Calluna vulgaris*, Cross-leaved Heath *Erica tetralix* and Creeping Willow *Salix repens*, while where it is wetter and most acidic, patches of bog mosses *Sphagnum* spp. occur with Bog Asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum* and Common Cotton-grass *Eriophorum angustifolium*.

The site in part has been traditionally managed for hay and supports a mesotrophic plant community not known elsewhere in Devon. It is characterised by abundant Great Burnet *Sanguisorba officinalis*, itself a local species in Devon, Yellow Rattle *Rhinanthus minor*

and rushes *Juncus* spp. Other plant species present include Oval Sedge *Carex ovalis*, Southern Marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* and Ragged-Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*.

At the lowest part of the site where the ground is waterlogged a marsh community has developed, with abundant Hemlock Water-dropwort *Oenanthe crocata*, Wild Angelica *Angelica sylvestris* and Meadow-sweet *Filipendula ulmaria* as well as rushes. On the edges of this marsh a good population of the nationally rare wavy St John's-wort *Hypericum undulatum* occurs.

The site is enhanced by the broad scrub and woodland strips that occur between fields, often grading down gently to the open sward. Species of shrub and tree present include Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur*, Alder *Alnus glutinosa* and Aspen *Populus tremula* and the shrubs Hazel *Corylus avellana*, Spindle *Euonymus europaeus* and Eared Willow *Salix aurita*. The local Broad-leaved Helleborine *Epipactis helleborine* is among the woodland herbs present.

Butterflies present include the scarce Marsh Fritillary *Eurodryas aurinia* and Silver-washed Fritillary *Argynnis paphia*. Breeding birds include Willow Tit *Parus montanus*, Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* and Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoenicula*, and mammals include Harvest Mouse *Micromys minutus* and Noctule Bat *Nyctalus noctula*, the latter feeding over the fields.