

COUNTY: DORSET SITE NAME: SUTTON COMBE

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 877163 Area: 16.2 (ha.) 40.0 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 183 1:10,000: ST 81 NE

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

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

Other Information:

New site. Adjacent to Fontmell and Melbury Downs SSSI.
Within Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

This south west facing combe on the edge of the chalk escarpment in north east Dorset, supports unimproved chalk downland with a rich flora and fauna.

The grassland is mainly dominated by Sheep's Fescue *Festuca ovina* with a number of other grasses including Meadow Oat *Avenula pratensis*, Quaking Grass *Briza media*, Crested Hair-grass *Koeleria macrantha* and, especially where there is scrub, False Brome *Brachypodium sylvaticum*. The grassland is rich in herbs with south facing slopes holding abundant Squinancywort *Asperula cynanchica*, Bird's-foot-Trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* and Salad Burnet *Sanguisorba minor*. Horseshoe Vetch *Hippocrepis comosa* and Common Rock-rose *Helianthemum nummularium* are locally frequent here. Orchids are well represented on this site and include Fragrant Orchid *Gymnadenia conopsea* and Frog Orchid *Coeloglossum viride*, both local species in Dorset. On west to north west facing slopes, the turf contains much Devil's-bit *Succisa pratensis* and Cowslip *Primula veris*. Other frequent herbs of these swards include Rough Hawkbit *Leontodon hispidus*, Burnet Saxifrage *Pimpinella saxifraga* and Harebell *Campanula rotundifolia*. The frequent anthills support Red Fescue *Festuca rubra* and Wild Thyme *Thymus praecox*.

Scrub, which forms dense patches in places, is mainly Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and associated species are Traveller's-joy *Clematis vitalba* and Dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*.

Breeding butterflies include the commoner downland species as well as the very local Duke of Burgundy Fritillary *Hamaeris lucina*, Adonis Blue *Lysandra bellargus* and Marsh Fritillary *Eurodryas aurinia*. Moths include Wood Tiger *Parasemia plantaginis* and Cistus Forester *Procris geryon*, both uncommon downland species.