

COUNTY: DORSET                      SITE NAME: HORTON COMMON

DISTRICT: WIMBORNE DISTRICT

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

Local Planning Authority:    WIMBORNE DISTRICT COUNCIL, Dorset County Council

National Grid Reference: SU 070070                      Area: 20.4 (ha.) 50.3 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 195                      1:10,000: SU 00 NE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1977                      Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1984                      Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Description and Reasons for Notification:

In 1981, before a large part was destroyed by ploughing, Horton Common was one of the most extensive unbroken tracts of heathland in Dorset. Areas which have remained undamaged still support the range of heathland types from dry heath to wet heath and bog with plants and animals typical of these habitats several of which are uncommon or rare.

On the higher ground there is dry heathland, which is dominated by Ling *Calluna vulgaris* with Bell Heather *Erica cinerea* and Dwarf Gorse *Ulex minor*. Lower lying areas have wet heath with Cross-leaved Heath *Erica tetralix*, Deer-grass *Trichophorum cespitosum*, Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* and the *Sphagnum* mosses *S. compactum* and *S. tenellum*. Both the White Beak-sedge *Rhynchospora alba* and the rare Brown Beak-sedge *R. fusca* occur here. The lowest parts of the common have bog communities dominated by Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* with Cotton-grass *Eriophorum angustifolium*, Bog Asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum* and the uncommon Pale Butterwort *Pinguicula lusitanica*. Mosses are important here especially Hair Moss *Polytrichum commune* and *Sphagnum papillosum*. Several other species of *Sphagnum* moss occur including the very local claret coloured *S. magellanicum*. Marsh Clubmoss *Lycopodiella inundata* a rare plant of heathland mainly in southern England is also present.

Although inevitably reduced by the damage to the heathland, the fauna of Horton Common reflects the range of habitats it still offers. Grasshoppers and crickets are well represented and include, on the dry heath, the rare Heath Grasshopper *Chorthippus vagans* which is found only on some heaths in Dorset and the New Forest. In the wetter areas there are good populations of the very local Bog Bush Cricket *Metrioptera brachyptera* and Short Winged Conehead *Conocephalus dorsalis*. Long Winged Conehead *C. discolor* a rare insect of extremely localised southern distribution, also occurs in these areas. The undamaged dry heathland with warm

south-facing banks and patches of bare sand provides excellent habitat for the rare Sand Lizard *Lacerta agilis*. Before the extensive damage of 1981, Horton Common supported 10% of Dartford Warblers *Sylvia undata* breeding in Dorset and more than 5% of the national population. This rare heathland bird still occurs at Horton but of course in considerably reduced numbers.