

File ref:

County: Northumberland **Site Name:** Alnmouth
Saltmarsh & Dunes

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

Local Planning Authority: Alnwick District Council

National Grid Reference: NU 245100 **Area:** 108.4 (ha) 267.8 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50 000 81 **1:10 000** NU 20 NW
NU 21 SW
NU 20 NE
NU 21 SE

First Notified: 1988

Date of notification: 5 July 1988

Other Information:

Description:

Alnmouth Saltmarsh and Dunes comprises mature saltmarsh and mudflats behind a single sand dune ridge in the Aln estuary. The saltmarsh is the largest area of this habitat on the north east coast of England between Lindisfarne and the Tees Estuary. The sand dunes, extending south in a single ridge from the river mouth, are of interest for the varied plant communities including the transition zone along the saltmarsh interface. Several plant species and associations found at this site are at or close to the northern limit of their distribution in Great Britain.

The saltmarsh is ungrazed and dominated by sea-purslane *Halimione portulacoides*, with an abundance of free-living forms of the seaweeds *Bostrychia scorpioides*, *Fucus vesiculosus* and *Pelvetia canaliculata* and is considered to be the most northerly example of this community in Britain. At higher levels the vegetation is more open, with thrift *Armeria maritima*, common saltmarsh-grass *Puccinellia maritima*, sea-plantain *Plantago maritima* and sea aster *Aster tripolium* associated with the sea-purslane.

Although common cord-grass *Spartina anglica* has colonised much of the intertidal mud the open areas are used by feeding and roosting gulls, dunlin and other waders including redshank, curlew and snipe which also feed in the saltmarsh creeks. At the freshwater inflow to the marsh are stands of common reed *Phragmites australis* and a community dominated by three locally rare species, sea rush *Juncus maritimus*, parsley water-dropwort *Oenanthe lachenalii* and slender spike-rush *Eleocharis uniglumis*. The interface between saltmarsh and dune is a distinct open habitat supporting reflexed saltmarsh grass *Puccinellia distans*, hard-grass *Parapholis strigosa* and sea-milkwort *Glaux maritima*.

The predominant vegetation of the dune ridge is a tall, ungrazed sward dominated by marram *Ammophila arenaria* which shelters an abundance of lesser meadow-rue *Thalictrum minus* with bloody crane's-bill *Geranium sanguineum* and hound's-tongue *Cynoglossum officinale* scattered throughout, and bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* is well established on the lower landward slopes. Where the turf is shorter the sward is more species-rich. Here cowslip *Primula veris*, early-purple orchid *Orchis mascula*, violets *Viola* sp., and yarrow *Achillea millefolium* are common with early forget-me-not *Myosotis ramosissima*, common cornsalad *Valerianella locusta*, hairy tare *Vicia hirsuta*, crosswort *Galium cruciata* and mosses also widespread.

The gravely substrate of an ancient raised beach, exposed by former sand extraction from the back of the dune ridge, supports a distinctive community with an abundance of wild thyme *Thymus praecox*, common stork's-bill *Erodium cicutarium*, mouse-ear hawkweed *Hieracium pilosella* and common centaury *Centaureum erythraea* together with common bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, common restharrow *Ononis repens*, blue fleabane *Erigeron acer*, crested hair-grass *Koeleria macrantha* and fern-grass *Desmazeria rigida*. Viper's-bugloss *Echium vulgare* and bloody crane's-bill grow around the margins of this area.