

COUNTY: DORSET

SITE NAME: TURNERS PUDDLE 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: PURBECK DISTRICT COUNCIL, Dorset County Council

National Grid Reference: SY 831904

Area: 390.1 (ha.) 963.9 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 194

1:10,000: SY 88 NW, 89 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): –

Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1990

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

A new site.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

This extensive area of lowland heathland lies between the rivers Piddle and Frome. It has developed on infertile soils derived from Bagshot sands and clays overlain locally with plateau gravels. A small area of heath also occurs on Reading Beds. The site contains one of the largest continuous heathland tracts remaining in Dorset although the heath has been fragmented by forestry plantation and military activity. Many of the typical Dorset heathland species that have become nationally rare through heathland loss are well represented.

A number of different heathland plant communities are present, their occurrence dependent on the soil moisture regime. The freely drained soils that occupy most of the higher ground support dry heath. Here, Heather *Calluna vulgaris* is dominant with Dwarf Gorse *Ulex minor*, Bell Heather *Erica cinerea* and Bristle Bent *Agrostis curtisii* frequent. Where drainage is impeded, usually on lower ground, wet heath has developed on seasonally waterlogged soils. Small differences in soil moisture conditions in these areas determine the proportions of Cross-leaved Heath *Erica tetralix*, Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, Heather, Deer-grass *Trichophorum cespitosum* and the Bog mosses *Sphagnum compactum* and *S. tenellum* within the vegetation with increasing wetness favouring Cross-leaved Heath over Heather.

The site is intersected by three valley systems, two of which drain southwards to the Frome and one northwards to the Piddle. In the wettest areas along the valley bottoms, in hollows or 'perched' bogs further up-slope, soils are permanently waterlogged and valley mire communities have developed on peat. These communities are floristically rich. Bog Asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum* and several species of Bog Moss *Sphagnum* spp. are locally abundant including *S. papillosum* and the very restricted *S. pulchrum*. White Beak-sedge *Rhynchospora alba* and both Oblong-leaved and Round-leaved Sundew *Drosera intermedia* and *D. rotundifolia* are particularly associated with the margins of the bog pools. Many areas are transitional between valley mire and wet heath vegetation types

and these are important for two nationally scarce plants, Marsh Gentian *Gentiana pneumonanthe* and Brown Beak-sedge *Rhynchospora fusca*.

The bog pools support a number of typical heathland dragonflies including the local Small Red Damselfly *Ceriagrion tenellum*. Other restricted insects present in suitable habitat within the site include Bog Bush-cricket *Metrioptera brachyptera* and Silver Studded Blue Butterfly *Plebejus argus*.

All of Britain's 6 native species of reptile breed on the site. The dry heathland and adjacent habitats support several good populations of the two species which are both rare and protected, Sand Lizard *Lacerta agilis*\* and Smooth Snake *Coronella austriaca*\*. The dry heath with stands of Common Gorse *Ulex europaeus* also provides habitat for the heathland birds Stonechat *Saxicola torquata* and the rare Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*<sup>+</sup>\$. Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*<sup>\$</sup> breed on the site and wet heath and bog provide important feeding areas for Hobby *Falco subbuteo*<sup>+</sup>.

\*Species listed in Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

<sup>+</sup>Species listed in Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

<sup>\$</sup>Species listed in Annex 1 of the EC Bird Directive.