

COUNTY: Devon

SITE NAME: BURSDON MOOR

DISTRICT: Torridge

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, Torridge District Council

National Grid Reference: SS 267 200 Area: 144.2 (ha) 356.3 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 190 1:10,000: SS 21 NE, SS 22 SE

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1988 Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

A new site. Partly within North Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Site description:

The site comprises a large tract of exposed lowland moor grading from dry heath through wet heath to herb-rich marshy grassland. This composite nature is characteristic of a type of heathland restricted in Britain to North Devon and Pembrokeshire.

The Moor is situated 5 km inland from the coast and some 16 km north of Bude. It lies at an altitude of about 200 m, the major part of the site rising gently southwards, with a small steep-sided valley to the south-west containing one of the headwater streams of the River Welcome. The site rests on the shales of the Crackington formation, on of the Culm Measure series of Carboniferous age. The soils range from brown earths on the well-drained upper slopes to heavy gleyed clays overlain by varying depths of peat in the poorly drained stream basins.

The higher part of the Moor is covered by a grassy heath dominated by Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* with Heather *Calluna vulgaris*, Cross-leaved Heath *Erica tetralix* and Western Gorse *Ulex gallii* as sub-dominants. Associated species include Creeping Willow *Salix repens*, Petty Whin *Genista anglica*, Saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria*. Heath Spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza maculata*. Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis*, Green-ribbed Sedge *Carex binervis*, Carnation Sedge *C. panicea* and the Bog-moss *Sphagnum compactum*. In places, the Purple Moor-grass which dominates the vegetation over most of the Moor gives way to a shorter vegetation dominated by Heather, Cross-leaved Heath and Deergrass *Trichophorum cespitosum* interspersed with stands of Bristle Bent *Agrostis curtisii*. Mosses and lichens are well represented, with mosses such as *Leucobryum glaucum*, *Sphagnum tenellum* and *Lophocia ventricosa* present and lichens such as *Cladonia impexa* and *C. pyxidata*.

On wetter peaty soils the plant communities grade towards those characteristic of wet heath. Typical species here are Bog Asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum*. Bog Violet *Viola palustris*, Common Cotton-grass *Eriophorum angustifolium*, Sharp-flowered Rush *Juncus acutiflorus*, Soft Rush *J. effusus* and Compact Rush *J. conglomeratus*. This community has a high bryophyte cover, with the bog-mosses *Sphagnum papillosum* and *S. cuspidatum* being the major constituents.

The wet valley bottom at the head of the stream in the south-west of the site supports an area of acidic marshy grassland. This is dominated by Purple Moor-grass and Sharp-flowered Rush with frequent Common Sedge *Carex nigra*, Star Sedge *C. echinata*, Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*, Bog Pondweed *Potamogeton polygonifolius* and Water Horsetail *Equisetum fluviatile*.

Drier ground throughout the site supports patches of scrub dominated by Gorse *Ulex europaeus* and Bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, with Wood Sage *Teucrium scorodonia*, Heather, Cat's-ear *Hypochoeris radicata*, Tomentil *Potentilla erecta* and Betony *Stachys officinalis*.

A rich invertebrate fauna has been recorded here including the local Marsh Fritillary *Euphydryas aurinia*, small Pearl-bordered Fritillary *Boloria selene*. Marbled White *Melanargia galathea* and the Green Hairstreak *Callophrys rubi* butterflies, and the nationally scarce cranefly *Limnophila pulchella* and leaf beetle *Cassida vittata*.

The site supports a range of lowland moorland breeding birds such as Curlew *Numenius arquata*, Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*, Skylark *Alauda arvensis* and Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*. The common Lizard *Lacerta vivipara*, Adder *Vipera berus* and Common Frog *Rana temporaria* have all been recorded here.