

County: Dorset **Site Name:** Batcombe Down

District: West Dorset

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

Local Planning Authority: West Dorset District Council, Dorset County Council

National Grid Reference: ST 623040 **Area:** 18.6 (ha) 46.0 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 194 **1:10,000:** ST 60 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1952 **Date of Last Revision:** 1977

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985 **Date of Last Revision:** –

Other Information:

Boundary amended by extension and deletion.

Description:

The site comprises part of the steep north west facing scarp slope of the Dorset Chalk escarpment and is mainly Middle and Lower Chalk with a capping of Clay with flints. The soils consequently range from calcareous on chalk slopes to strongly acid on the superficial deposits. The site is especially interesting for the close occurrence of plant communities characteristic of these soil types.

The chalk slopes which hold a flora locally dominated by red or sheep's fescue *Festuca rubra/ovina*, upright brome *Bromus erectus* and cocksfoot *Dactylis glomerata*, are of particular interest for orchids. Common spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* is abundant, bee orchid *Ophrys apifera* and pyramidal orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis* also occur whilst the rarer orchids, fly orchid *Ophrys insectifera*, butterfly orchid *Platanthera chlorantha* and musk orchid *Herminium monorchis* are also reported. This is the only known Dorset site for the latter.

The acid swards, once part of an extensive area of chalk heath, are dominated by species of bent grass *Agrostis* spp. and red fescue *Festuca rubra*. They contain Ling *Calluna vulgaris*, bell heather *Erica cinerea*, wavy hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa*, bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* and bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*.

The scrub also shows considerable variety with dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*, wayfaring tree *Viburnum lantana* and traveller's joy *Clematis vitalba* on the chalk and common and western gorses *Ulex europaeus* and *U. gallii* on the acid areas.

Among the many butterflies of this site, marsh fritillary *Euphydryas aurinia* is present and there is a strong population of the very local Duke of Burgundy fritillary *Hamaeris lucina*.