

COUNTY: DORSET SITE NAME: HOG CLIFF

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: SY 615975 Area: 86.7 (ha.) 214.2 (ac.)
 SY 625978
 SY 628967

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 194 1:10,000: SY 69 NW

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 27.9.85 Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

New site. Within the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Site Description:

The site comprises downland slopes with rich grassland communities typical of the chalk of west-central Dorset on a range of aspects. Areas of scrub and a small amount of old woodland add diversity to this site.

The grassland varies considerably in its character depending on the gradient and aspect of the slopes. The steeper slopes have exceptionally rich communities of the Sheep's Fescue/Meadow Oat *Festuca ovina/Avenula pratensis* sub group. Slopes with a southern aspect have a large amount of Rockrose *Helianthemum nummularium* with a variety of other attractive herbs including Small Scabious, *Scabiosa columbaria*, Felwort *Gentianella amarella*, Wild thyme *Thymus praecox*, Rough Hawkbit *Leontodon hispidus*, Stemless Thistle *Cirsium acaule* and the local Clustered Bellflower *Campanula glomerata*. The highest proportions of Devil's-bit *Succisa pratensis* and Betony *Stachys officinalis*, which are typically abundant in the chalk grassland of West Dorset are found on the west and north facing slopes. Cowslip *Primula veris*, Hoary Plantain *Plantago media* and Pignut *Conopodium majus* are frequent here and in one location Lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica*, a plant rarely encountered on chalk downland, is present.

On flatter ground near the tops and bottoms of the slopes grassland with a high proportion of Creeping Bent *Agrostis stolonifera* and Crested Dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* predominates. These swards tend to have fewer herbs but generally Salad Burnet *Sanguisorba minor* and Rough Hawkbit are frequent. In places where more acid soils have developed above the slopes on Clay with Flints, Tormentil *Potentilla erecta* is common.

The fungi of the site are abundant and diverse and include a number of uncommon species. Grassland fungi are particularly well represented. More than 60 genera have been positively identified so far and these include at least 8 species of Wax cap *Hygrocybe* spp. and 9 species of Mushroom *Agaricus* spp.

Scrub is found principally on the upper slopes and contains Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, Hazel *Corylus avellana*, Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* and Common and Western Gorses *Ulex europaeus* and *U. gallii*. The woodlands are typical of the small woods of the downs of Central/West Dorset. The dominant trees are Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and Oak *Quercus robur* with a significant quantity of Field Maple *Acer campestre*. The understorey is dominated by Hazel and the ground flora by Dog's Mercury *Mercurialis perennis* or Bluebell *Hyacynthoides non-scriptus*. The uncommon parasitic plant Toothwort *Lathraea squamaria* occurs here.

The invertebrates of the site have not been well studied but the range of aspects and diversity, composition and structure of the vegetation suggests that a rich invertebrate fauna is likely. It is known that there are colonies of two scarce butterflies: Adonis Blue *Lysandra bellargus* and Marsh Fritillary *Eurodryas aurinia*.