

COUNTY: DORSET

SITE NAME: STOBOROUGH AND CREECH HEATHS

DISTRICT: PURBECK

Status: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended. Part of site National Nature Reserve (NNR) – Stoborough Heath – declared under Section 19 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.

Local Planning Authority: PURBECK DISTRICT COUNCIL, Dorset County Council

National Grid Reference: SY 933846

Area: 339.9 (ha.) 839.9 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 195

1:10,000: SY 98 NW, NE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1972

Date of Last Revision: 1977 and 1982

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

A Nature Conservation Review Site. Part of the site was formerly in Arne SSSI.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Stoborough and Creech Heaths, though divided by two roads, comprise one of the larger areas of lowland heathland in Purbeck. There is a full range of heathland communities from dry heath to valley bog and carr. The site has an exceptionally rich heathland flora and fauna including many species which are local or rare. There is evidence of former clay workings in many parts of the site and the south of Creech Heath is subject to current clay extraction.

The dry heath is dominated by Ling *Calluna vulgaris* with Bell Heather *Erica cinerea* and Dwarf Gorse *Ulex minor*. Stands of Common Gorse *Ulex europaeus* are frequent and Western Gorse *Ulex gallii* occurs locally. Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* occurs in a few areas. On the damp and wet heathland Ling, Cross-leaved Heath *Erica tetralix*, Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, Carnation Sedge *Carex panicea* and Deer Grass *Trichophorum cespitosum* are generally the major species but, particularly in the north and east of the site, the rare Dorset Heath *Erica ciliaris* is locally dominant. A number of other rare plants occur in this habitat, some in substantial populations. Marsh Gentian *Gentiana pneumonanthe* is well represented; the rare Brown Beak-sedge *Rhynchospora fusca* is locally abundant and the very local Marsh Clubmoss *Lycopodiella inundata* occurs on patches of bare wet peat. Yellow Bartsia *Parentucellia viscosa*, another scarce plant, is frequent on areas of heathy grassland. Stands of Marsh and Spotted Orchids and hybrids *Dactylorhiza* spp. are an especially attractive feature of this site.

Substantial parts of the site have a permanently high water table where bog communities have developed over peat. Where the water supply is more base rich, the bogs are marked by the presence of Black Bog-rush *Schoenus nigricans* and elsewhere the bog mosses *Sphagnum* spp. are the dominant cover. The rare and attractive *Sphagnum pulchrum* is abundant here. Other scarce and rare plants occur in the bogs and ‘Sphagnum lawns’, including Oblong-

leaved Sundew *Drosera intermedia*, Pale Butterwort *Pinguicula lusitanica* and Bog Orchid *Hammarbya paludosa*.

There are areas of Sallow *Salix cinerea* carr and birch *Betula* woodland mostly along the courses of streams and parts of the site support stands of Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris* and Maritime Pine *Pinus pinaster*.

Stoborough and Creech Heaths with their variety of heathland habitats and some areas with traditional low levels of grazing, are extremely rich in invertebrates. The small streams and bog pools support all of the typical heathland dragonflies including uncommon and rare species such as Small Red Damselfly *Ceriagrion tenellum* and the Southern Coenagrion *Coenagrion mercuriale*. The Silver-studded Blue butterfly *Plebejus argus* is locally frequent while many more widespread butterflies are associated with the scrub and herb-rich grass/heath mosaic. Grasshoppers and crickets are an especially important group with several rare species present. These include Short- and Long-winged Coneheads *Conocephalus dorsalis* and *C. discolor*, Heath Grasshopper *Chorthippus vagans* and Wart-biter *Decticus verrucivorus*. All 6 British reptiles occur including strong populations of the rare and specially protected Sand Lizard *Lacerta agilis* and Smooth Snake *Coronella austriaca*.

Stands of gorse on dry heath provide habitat for several species of birds, such as Stonechat *Saxicola torquata* and the rare Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*, both of which nest in important numbers. In Winter the open heathland is used by wintering birds including Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* and Merlin *Falco columbarius*.