

COUNTY: DORSET

SITE NAME: STUDLAND AND GODLINSTON HEATHS

DISTRICT: PURBECK

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

Local Planning Authority: DORSET COUNTY COUNCIL, Purbeck District Council

National Grid Reference: SZ 030845                      Area: 758.9 (ha.) 1875.2 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 195                      1:10,000: SZ 08 SW, NW, SY 98 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1954                      Date of Last Revision: 1977

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986                      Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Most is owned by the National Trust. Within Dorset AONB and Heritage Coast.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Underlying the south and west of this site are the Bagshot Beds against which sand dunes have built up over the past 3 or 4 centuries forming a large part of the South Haven Peninsula and enclosing a lake, Little Sea. In addition to the importance of the peninsula as a key site for coastal geomorphology, the range of habitats on Studland and Godlingston Heaths, including a fine expanse of heathland with many rare animals, makes this area of outstanding importance for nature conservation.

South Haven Peninsula provides an excellent example of progradation of a sandy beach which has been very well documented in historical records and by more recent field surveys. Three main ridges occur, each with dunes fronted by a seaward slope extending beneath alluvial deposits. There are few prograding sand beaches in southern Britain and South Haven Peninsula is a key member of the national network of soft coastal sites. It is extensively used as an educational site as the links between geomorphological process and ecological succession are especially well exemplified.

The fore dunes have Sea Lyme Grass *Leymus arenarius* and Sand Couch *Elymus farctus* on the seaward edge, giving way quickly to the dominant cover of Marram Grass *Ammophila arenaria*. Sand sedge *Carex arenaria* and the herbs Sea Bindweed *Calystegia soldanella* and Sheep's Bit *Jasione montana* are frequent and the uncommon Dune Fescue *Vulpia membranacea* also occurs. The dune system is composed of highly acidic sand and behind the fore dunes stable dune vegetation is entirely heathland. The former dune ridges are covered by dry heathland vegetation in which Ling *Calluna vulgaris* is dominant. There is a very important heathland lichen community. The intervening dune slacks with a high water table are dominated by Common Sallow *Salix cinerea* and birch *Betula* sp. carr in which the very local Royal fern *Osmunda regalis* is a conspicuous element. In open areas in the low-lying slacks there is wet heath with bog pools and here the rare Marsh Clubmoss *Lycopodiella inundata* occurs locally. The dune slacks run northwards from Little Sea, a substantial

freshwater lake fringed by reedswamp containing Common Reed *Phragmites australis* and Greater Reedmace *Typha latifolia*. The lake is low in plant nutrients and acid in character. The submerged flora includes several rare species such as Six-stamened Waterwort *Elatine hexandra* and Spring Quillwort *Isoetes echinospora*.

To the north, south and west of Little Sea the acidic sands and gravels of the Bagshot Beds support varied heathland comprising one of the larger expanses of this habitat left in Dorset. The higher ground of Godlingston Heath is marked by sharp relief and the occurrence of many fragments and boulders of ironstone. Such well-drained slopes support dry heathland dominated by Ling with Bell Heather *Erica cinerea*, Bristle Bent *Agrostis curtisii*, Dwarf Gorse *Ulex minor* and stands of Common Gorse *U. europaeus*. Near the Agglestone Rock – the largest of the ironstone boulders – Bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* occurs, a scarce plant in Dorset heathland. Level ground with impeded drainage supports damp and wet heathland dominated by Ling, Crossleaved Heath *Erica tetralix* and Purple Moor Grass *Molinia caerulea*, with abundant lichens. The rare Dorset Heath *Erica ciliaris* occurs locally and Marsh Gentian *Gentiana pneumonanthe* is frequent. Valley mires with bog pools are a notable feature and support a rich variety of bog mosses *Sphagnum* spp. including *S. pulchrum*. Bog Asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum* and Common Cottongrass *Eriophorum angustifolium* are widespread; Black Bog-rush *Schoenus nigricans* and Long-Leaved Sundew *Drosera intermedia* are abundant in places and the rare Brown Beak – Sedge *Rhynchospora fusca* and the scarce Great Sundew *Drosera anglica* occur locally.

The heathland grades into the saltmarshes of Poole Harbour to the north and deciduous woodland of birch, Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur* and Hazel *Corylus avellana* with willow and Aspen *Populus tremula* south of Little Sea. There are several stands of self-sown Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris*. In the south of the site there is further habitat diversity with heathy grassland of high floristic interest fringing the golf course.

The range of habitats and their transitions support a very rich invertebrate fauna. The site is of great importance for dragonflies with 22 species occurring, including uncommon species such as Small Red Damselfly *Ceriagrion tenellum* and Hairy Dragonfly *Brachytron pratense*; and for grasshoppers and crickets which include the rare Heath Grasshopper *Chorthippus vagans*, Large Marsh Grasshopper *Stethophyma grossum* and Woodland Grasshopper *Omocestus rufipes*. A great diversity of dipteran flies, moths and beetles has been recorded including a number of very restricted distribution such as the Weevil *Strophosomus curvipes*. Butterflies are well recorded and include the restricted heathland species Silver-studded Blue *Plebejus argus*.

All six British reptiles are present including strong populations of the rare Sand Lizard *Lacerta agilis* and Smooth Snake *Coronella austriaca*. This heathland is one of the most important breeding sites in the country for the rare Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*. Other heathland birds breeding here include Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* and Stonechat *Saxicola torquata* and the many swamps and pools support several pairs of Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*. Outside of the breeding season Little Sea is important for wildfowl, with notable concentrations of Pochard *Athya ferina*, Scaup *A. marila*, Gadwall *Anas strepera* and Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula* amongst the species regularly present.