

COUNTY: DORSET SITE NAME: CRANBORNE COMMON

DISTRICT: EAST DORSET

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

Local Planning Authority: EAST DORSET DISTRICT COUNCIL, Dorset County Council

National Grid Reference: SU 104113 Area: 134.7 (ha.) 332.8 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 195 1:10,000: SU 01 SE, 11 SW

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985 Date of Last Revision: 1991

Other Information:

Site amended by extension and deletion.

Part of this site is a Dorset Trust for Nature Conservation Reserve.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

A complex of heathland and acidic grassland, this site comprises the most northerly heathland communities on the Tertiary deposits of Dorset. There is considerable variety of vegetation with dry and wet heath, bog and grassland, subject to differing management and with great species-richness, including many plants and animals which are local and rare.

On much of the higher ground soils drain freely and support dry heath dominated by Heather *Calluna vulgaris* with Dwarf Gorse *Ulex minor* and Bell Heather *Erica cinerea*. In contrast on the prominent hillock at King Barrow Dwarf Gorse is replaced by Western Gorse *Ulex gallii*, which is unusual on the eastern Dorset Heaths. In both areas stands of Common Gorse *Ulex europaeus* and Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* occur. The dry heath grades into wet heath where Cross-leaved Heath *Erica tetralix*, Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* and the bog mosses *Sphagnum compactum* and *S. tenellum* are frequent. A number of local and scarce species occur in this habitat. These include Round-leaved and Oblong-leaved Sundew *Drosera rotundifolia* and *D. intermedia*, Bog Pimpernel *Anagallis tenella* and two nationally scarce species Marsh Clubmoss *Lycopodiella inundata* and Marsh Gentian *Gentiana pneumonanthe*. In the wettest places Bog Asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum* is frequent, together with several species of *Sphagnum* including *S. papillosum* and the local *S. magellanicum*. Brown Beak-sedge *Rhynchospora fusca*, a nationally scarce plant, and White Sedge *Carex curta*, a species rare in southern Britain, are also present. Some of the heaths are grazed and additional characteristic species here include Petty Whin *Genista anglica*, Meadow Thistle *Cirsium dissectum*, Marsh Lousewort *Pedicularis palustris* and the nationally scarce Yellow Bartsia *Parentucellia viscosa*.

At the western end of the site the heath is replaced by acidic grassland. Although heathers are present, the sward is dominated by grasses such as *Molinia*, Heath Grass *Danthonia decumbens*, Sweet Vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and bent grasses *Agrostis* spp. At least seven sedge species occur, with local species such as Flea Sedge *Carex pulicaris* and Pill Sedge *C. pilulifera* present. Extensive stands of Marsh and Heath Spotted Orchids *Dactylorhiza* spp. occur and the local Pale Butterwort *Pinguicula lusitanica* is present.

The site supports the most northerly populations in Dorset of two rare and protected reptiles Sand Lizard *Lacerta agilis** and Smooth Snake *Coronella austriaca** in Dorset. Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*+\$ and Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*\$ also breed on this heathland and several of the rarer heathland invertebrates are recorded. These include two Red Data Book species, Heath Grasshopper *Chorthippus vagans* and Large Marsh Grasshopper *Stethophyma grossum*, as well as Bog Bush-cricket *Metrioptera brachyptera*, Small Red Damselfly *Ceriagrion tenellum* and the butterfly Silver-studded Blue *Plebejus argus*, 3 nationally scarce insects.

*Species listed in Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

+Species listed in Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

\$\$Species listed in Annex 1 of the EC Bird Directive.