

COUNTY: HEREFORD & WORCESTER

SITE NAME: CASTLEMORTON
COMMON

DISTRICT: MALVERN HILLS

SITE REF: 15WPK

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

Local Planning Authority: HEREFORD & WORCESTER COUNTY COUNCIL, Malvern Hills District Council

National Grid Reference: SO 784392

Area: 158.66 (ha.) 392 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 150

1:10,000: SO 73 NE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1955

Date of Last Revision: 1975

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Within the Malvern Hills AONB. Managed by the Malvern Hills Conservators.

Reasons for Notification:

Castlemorton Common is situated at the foot off the Malvern Hills. It lies on soils derived from drift deposits which overlie the impermeable Keuper marl and consists mainly of low lying rough pasture with marshy areas, streams and frequent patches of scrub.

The prime importance of the site is its grassland communities. These include areas of dry neutral unimproved grassland which are relatively species rich. They are dominated by a mixture of grasses, such as crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, red fescue *Festuca rubra* and mat-grass *Nardus stricta*. The soils over most of the area are slightly acidic as indicated by the presence of sorrel *Rumex acetosa* and tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, but in a few places species preferring more base-rich conditions are evident such as mouse-ear hawkweed *Hieracium pilosella* and stemless thistle *Cirsium acaule*. Small areas of semi-improved grassland occur alongside the road. In the grassland there are many active ant hills, especially in the drier areas. These provide a valuable food source for the green woodpecker *Picus viridis*. In some areas the water table is very high and this has given rise to a wet grassland community characterised by tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa*. Two streams flow through the site bordered by marshy grassland, having an abundance of rushes including soft rush *Juncus effusus*, hard rush *J. inflexus*, conglomerate rush *J. conglomeratus* and jointed rush *J. articulatus*. These areas are particularly species rich and include several uncommon species such as marsh arrowgrass *Triglochin palustris*, flat-sedge *Blysmus compressus*, fleabane *Pulicaria dysenterica*, common spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, tubular water-dropwort *Oenanthe fistulosa*, parsley water-dropwort *O. lachenalii* and the rare narrow-leaved water-dropwort *O. silaifolia*. The marshy grassland is a favoured habitat for birds such as snipe *Gallinago gallinago* and reed bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*.

In the north east corner of the site is a small pond which in summer becomes completely overgrown with floating sweet-grass *Glyceria fluitans*, creeping bent *Agrostis stolonifera* and marsh foxtail *Alopecurus geniculatus*. Lesser marshwort *Apium inundatum*, an uncommon species, has been recorded from here.

Scattered over the site are areas of scrub consisting of gorse *Ulex europaeus*, western gorse *U. gallii*, hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg. and rose *Rosa* spp. The scrub is valuable for insects and provides nesting sites for birds such as the stonechat *Saxicola torquata*.

At the north eastern end of the site is a small area of broad-leaved woodland containing several pollards of the native black poplar *Populus nigra* – a species with a very restricted distribution in Britain.