

File ref:

County: Hampshire **Site Name:** Beacon Hill, Warnford SSSI

Local Planning Authority: Hampshire County Council, Winchester City Council

National Grid Reference: SU 604234 **Area:** 44.8 (ha) 110.7 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 185 **1:25,000** SU 62

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1979 **Date of Last Revision:** –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1984 **Date of Last Revision:** –

Other Information:

The area is managed under an Agreement between the owner and the NCC under Section 15 of the Countryside Act, 1968. A detached area included in this Agreement was added in 1984.

Reasons for Notification:

A chalk spur capped with clay-with-flints, overlooking the Meon valley from the west. The steep north- and south-facing slopes of the spur support a herb-rich chalk grassland flora, beech *Fagus*/ash *Fraxinus*/hazel *Corylus* woodland and chalk scrub. Hawthorn encroachment of open grassland has occurred in the relatively recent past but is now held in check by heavy rabbit grazing.

There is considerable variation both in species composition and structure of the grassland, resulting, in part, from variation in grazing pressure and soil depth. Sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina*, salad burnet *Poterium sanguisorba* and rock-rose *Helianthemum nummularium* are typical dominants, with such characteristic herbs as horseshoe vetch *Hippocrepis comosa*, yellow-wort *Blackstonia perfoliata*, fragrant orchid *Gymnadenia conopsea* and clustered bellflower *Campanula glomerata*. Rarer species present are rampion *Phyteuma tenerum*, field fleawort *Senecio integrifolius*, hairy rock-cress *Arabis hirsuta* and man orchid *Aceras anthropophorum*. The grassland exhibits an exceptionally high density of ant hills which support a characteristic flora of small herbs often dominated by rock-rose. Several of these and other plants on the site are now confined in Hampshire to a handful of isolated localities.

The grassland supports an exceptionally rich butterfly fauna. Twenty-five species are known to breed, including colonies of two rarities – the silver-spotted skipper *Hesperia comma* and Duke of Burgundy Fritillary *Hamearis lucina* – and comparatively large populations of brown argus *Aricia agestis*, green hairstreak *Callophrys rubi*, chalkhill blue *Lysandra coridon*, marbled white *Melanargia galathea* and dingy skipper *Erynnis tages*.

The detached area of the Site of Special Scientific Interest is a north-facing bank which although possessing a poorer butterfly fauna, comprises a species-rich chalk flora comparable with that of the main spur of Beacon Hill.