

NOTIFIED TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE ON 10 JULY 1988

COUNTY: DORSET SITE NAME: HOLT AND WEST MOORS
HEATHS

DISTRICT: EAST DORSET

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

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

National Grid Reference: SU 030058 Area: 766.25 (ha.) 1893.4 (ac.)
SU 060040
SU 096070

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 195 1:10,000: SU 00 NE, NE, SW, SE
SU 10 NW

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1987 Date of Last Revision: 1988

Other Information:

Boundary revised by extension and deletion.

Part of site listed in 'A Nature Conservation Review', Ed. D. A Ratcliffe
(Cambridge University Press 1977).

Description and Reasons for Notification:

The site comprises areas of heathland lying on acidic sands, clays and gravels between the Upper Moors River and its tributaries Mannington Brook and Uddens Water. Holt Heath is one of the largest remaining areas of heathland in Dorset and the other blocks are fragments of once extensive areas at Lower Common, Mannington and West Moors. Holt Forest and Wood lie to the west on soils derived from London Clay.

Dry heathland within the various parts of the site is of the Heather *Calluna vulgaris*/Dwarf Gorse *Ulex minor* type, with associated Bell Heather *Erica cinerea* and Bristle Bent *Agrostis curtisii*. Wetter areas are characterised by Cross-leaved Heath *Erica tetralix* and Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, the latter dominating where there is a high fluctuating water table. Deer Grass *Trichophorum cespitosum* is typical of the wet heath areas and locally the rare Marsh Gentian *Gentiana pneumonanthe* and Marsh Clubmoss *Lycopodiella inundata* occur.

Bog vegetation has developed in the more waterlogged parts at Holt, forming an extensive valley mire. Comprising abundant *Sphagnum* mosses including the uncommon *S. magellanicum* and *S. pulchrum*, these peat forming communities also have Common Cottongrass *Eriophorum angustifolium*, Bog Asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum*, White Beak-sedge *Rhynchospora alba* and the rare Brown Beak-sedge *R. fusca*.

Common Gorse *Ulex europaeus*, Downy Birch *Betula pubescens* and Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris* occur widely on the heathland, with local development of Sallow *Salix cinerea* wet woodland also a feature. Within the West Moors RAOC Depot additional features of interest are the areas of coarse grass sward with large populations of Heath and Marsh Orchids *Dactylorhiza ericetorum* and *D. praetermissa* and Green Winged Orchid *Orchis morio*.

Together these habitats support a rich and typical fauna. The heathland birds include Hobby *Falco subbuteo*, Nightjar *Caprimulgus caprimulgus* and Stonechat *Saxicola torquata* and there are important populations of Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata* and Woodlark *Lullula arborea*. The rare and declining Sand Lizard *Lacerta agilis* and Smooth Snake *Coronella austriaca* occur in suitable habitat. The invertebrate fauna includes strong populations of the rare Heath Grasshopper *Chorthippus vagans* and Large Marsh Grasshopper *Stethophyma grossum* and also of the uncommon Bog Bush-cricket *Metrioptera brachyptera* and Long-winged Conehead *Conocephalus discolor*. Silver-studded Blue Butterfly *Plebejus argus* is amongst the many butterfly species recorded and the rich dragonfly and damselfly fauna includes the nationally uncommon Small Red *Ceriagrion tenellum* and Scarce Blue-tailed *Ischnura pumilio* Damselflies.

Holt Forest is an area of former wood pasture, but grazing has ceased in recent times. It is dominated by Oak *Quercus robur* and very locally Beech *Fagus sylvatica*. The oldest oaks are massive, ancient trees with a history of pollarding. Holly *Ilex aquifolium* is abundant and Birch is widespread. The ground flora is impoverished -- a reflection of the acidic soils, long history of grazing and heavy shade. Amongst the woodland butterflies recorded here are Purple Hairstreak *Quercusia quercus*, White Admiral *Ladoga populi* and the very local Purple Emperor *Apatura iris*.