

COUNTY: DEVON AND SOMERSET      SITE NAME: BLACKDOWN AND  
SAMPFORD COMMONS

DISTRICT: MID DEVON, TAUNTON DEANE

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

Local Planning Authority: DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL, Somerset County Council,  
Mid Devon District Council, Taunton Deane Borough Council

National Grid Reference: ST 118161      Area: 155.19 (ha.) 383.48 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 193      1:10,000: ST 11 NW, ST 11 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1952      Date of Last Revision: 1971

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1983      Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Site area reduced since last Revision.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Blackdown and Sampford Commons have the finest and most extensive surviving examples of the heathland, carr woodland and marshy grassland habitats that have developed on the acidic soils overlying the Greensand and Keuper Marls of the Blackdown Hills.

The majority of the site supports high quality heathland with a diverse mixture of small shrubs. Dwarf Gorse *Ulex gallii*, Ling *Calluna vulgaris* and Bell Heather *Erica cinerea* are the dominant species, together with Cross-leaved Heath *E. tetralix* along the western margin, and Bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* occurring locally. Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, which is present as discrete blocks in parts of Sampford Common, becomes increasingly dominant amongst old quarry workings further south, where it is intermixed with small trees and bushes, including European Gorse *Ulex europaeus*, Rowan *Sorbus aucuparia*, Birch *Betula pubescens* and Oak *Quercus robur*. Diverse heathland communities still survive in those parts of Sampford Common which have been recently planted with conifers or damaged by fire.

The flora includes Wood Sage *Teucrium scorodonia*, Centaury *Centaureum erythraea* and Wavy Hair Grass *Deschampsia caespitosa* with abundant Bristle-Bent *Agrostis setacea* along tracks and burned areas.

The heathland supports a typical invertebrate fauna, including a wide variety of butterfly species, and with spiders notably abundant. The site is regionally important for birds which favour heathland habitats.

There is a large area of acid marshy grassland on the lower slopes of Blackdown Common. Purple Moor Grass *Molinia caerulea* is abundant with Cross-leaved Heath

and Bog-mosses *Sphagnum spp.* co-dominant. There is a wide variety of wet-ground plants, including Cotton Grass *Eriophorum vaginatum*, Sundew *Drosera rotundifolia*, Bog Asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum*, Bog Pimpernel *Anagallis tennella*, Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis* and Bristle Scirpus *Isolepis setacea*.

Small carr woodlands are present on the poorly-drained soils along the perimeter of the Commons. Birch is the dominant canopy tree, often singled from old coppice stools, with Alder *Alnus glutinosa* locally abundant. In the wettest parts Bog-mosses and Tufted Hard Grass *Deschampsia caespitosa* carpet the woodland floor. The upper slopes are drier, with more Oak, Rowan and Holly, and a ground flora dominated by Bilberry.