

SITE NOTIFIED TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE ON 18 NOVEMBER
1987

COUNTY: DORSET SITE NAME: CORFE MEADOWS

DISTRICT: PURBECK

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

Local Planning Authority: PURBECK DISTRICT COUNCIL, Dorset County
Council

National Grid Reference: SY 966840 Area: 24.1 (ha.) 59.6 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 195 1:10,000: SY 98 SE

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

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

Other Information:

A new site.

Adjacent to the Rempstone Heaths Site of Special Scientific Interest and the
Hartland Moor National Nature Reserve and Site of Special Scientific Interest.
The site lies within the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the
Dorset Heritage Coast.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

The meadows, lying mostly on alluvium in the valley of the Corfe River, have
had a long history of traditional management for hay. Consequently they have a
rich and attractive flora which is now rarely found in the county.

The meadows hold a range of grasses. Common- and Creeping Bents *Agrostis
capillaris* and *A. stolonifera* are frequent components of the sward with Sweet
Vernal Grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, Meadow Foxtail *Alopecurus pratensis*,
Crested Dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, Rye-grass *Lolium perenne* and
Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus*. Meadow Barley *Hordeum secalinum* is locally
dominant especially in damp areas close to the Corfe River.

There is a rich and attractive complement of flowering plants. Among the herbs
of the drier areas are Yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, which is locally abundant,
Oxeye Daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, Common Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*,
Rough Hawkbit *Leontodon hispidus*, Meadow Vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis*,
Meadow- and Creeping Buttercups *Ranunculus acris* and *R. repens*, Common
Sorrel *Rumex acetosa* and Red Clover *Trifolium pratense*. Pepper Saxifrage
Silaum silaus is present in places and Corky-fruited Water Dropwort *Oenanthe
pimpinelloides*, a local plant of southern England, is generally distributed and
frequent.

Wetter areas within the hay meadows have Soft- and Jointed Rushes *Juncus effusus* and *J. articulatus* with Ragged-Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*. Marsh Bedstraw *Galium palustre*, Lesser Spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*, Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus uliginosus* and Marsh-marigold *Caltha palustris*. In more frequently inundated areas not managed for hay tall fen vegetation has developed with much Reed Canary-grass *Phalaris arundinacea*, Greater- and Lesser Pond-sedge *Carex riparia* and *C. acutiformis*, Hemlock Water-dropwort *Oenanthe crocata* and Purple-loosetrife *Lythrum salicaria*.

Several cattle-grazed fields adjacent to the hay meadows are influenced by the acidic lateral flow and drier soil conditions associated with surrounding heathland areas, this resulting in modifications to the grassland community. Species frequently occurring within these areas include Tufted Hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa*, Common Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* and Lady's Bedstraw *Galium verum*. Wetter peripheral areas of poor fen vegetation contain Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*, Heath Spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza maculata*, Marsh Lousewort *Pedicularis palustris*, Devil's-bit Scabious, *Succisa pratensis* and Marsh Cinquefoil *Potentilla palustris*, a plant of restricted occurrence within Dorset. A small relict bog community is also present, being dominated by Bog-myrtle *Myrica gale* and Purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*.

A variety of trees and shrubs including Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur*, Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, Silver Birch *Betula pendula*, Hazel *Corylus avellana*, Common Sallow *Salix cinerea* and Alder *Alnus glutinosa* occur in a small block of wet woodland, in the hedgerows and along the banks of the Corfe River. These add diversity to the site and are of particular importance to the invertebrate fauna.

The fauna is known to contain a rich assemblage of commoner invertebrates including butterflies, spiders, mirid bugs, froghoppers and micromoths and among the beetles two local species, *Bruchus loti* and *Stenus pallitarsis* have been recorded.