

SITE NOTIFIED TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE ON 18 NOVEMBER 1987

CITATION

COUNTY: DEVON      SITE NAME: WHITELEIGH MEADOWS

DISTRICT: TORRIDGE

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

Local Planning Authority: DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL, Torrridge District Council

National Grid Reference: SS 415030      Area: 81.9 (ha.) 202.4 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 190      1:10,000: SS 40 SW

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

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

Other Information:

Description and Reasons for Notification:

The site is a large traditionally-managed area of unimproved grassland, very rich botanically, of a type which has much decreased in extent in recent years.

The site is located on the Carboniferous shales of the Culm Measures of North. Devon. It occupies land on both sides of a gently sloping valley of a stream which flows south-west to north-east at this point. The soils are acidic clays with restricted drainage.

The vegetation consists almost entirely of marshy unimproved, acidophilous grassland with Purple Moor Grass *Molinia caerulea* the most abundant species present. Other widely occurring species are Heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens*, Sweet Vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, Sharp-flowered Rush *Juncus acutiflorus*, Heather *Calluna vulgaris*, Cross-leaved Heath *Erica tetralix*, Creeping Willow *Salix repens*, Petty Whin *Genista anglica*, Tormentil *Potentilla erecta* and Deergass *Trichophorum cespitosus*, the last being uncommon in this area of Devon. The sward is characterised by abundant sedge species, mainly Tawny Sedge *Carex hostiana*, Star Sedge *C. echinata*, Carnation Sedge *C. panicea*, Green-ribbed Sedge *C. binervis* and Glaucous Sedge *C. flacca*, and herbs such as Betony *Stachys officinalis*, Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis*, Lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica*, Bog Asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum*, Heath Spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza maculata*, Common Cottongrass *Eriophorum angustifolium*, Saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria* and Heath Milkwort *Polygala serpyllifolia*. The uncommon Lesser Butterfly-orchid *Platanthera bifolia* and Dyers Greenweed *Genista tinctoria* and the nationally scarce Wavy St John-wort *Hypericum undulatum* also occur.

In the areas of very poorly drained ground a different plant community with Soft-Rush *Juncus effusus*, Compact Rush *J. comglomeratus*, Marsh Pennywort *Hydrocotyle*

*vulgaris*, Marsh St John's-wort *Hypericum elodes*, Bog Violet *Viola palustris*, Slender Spike-rush *Eleocharis uniglumis* and Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata* is found.

The fauna includes breeding Curlew *Numenius arquata* and Adder *Vivipera beris*.