

File ref:

**County:** Devon     **Site Name:** East Devon     **Pebblebed Heath**

**District:** East Devon

**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, East Devon District Council

**National Grid Reference:** SY 050880  
(ac)

**Area:** 1111.9 (ha) 2747.5

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:** 192  
SY 08 NW, NE, SW

**1:10,000:** SY 09 SW, SE,

**Date Notified (Under 1949 Act):** 1952, 1972, 1974 (parts)  
**Revision:** 1976

**Date of Last**

**Date Notified (Under 1981 Act):** 1983 (parts), 1986  
**Revision:** –

**Date of Last**

**Other Information:**

Nature Conservation Review Site. Incorporates SSSIs notified under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949 as Aylesbeare and Harpford Commons, Bicton and East Budleigh Commons, Colaton Raleigh and Woodbury Commons and Venn Ottery Common plus other areas included at this revision. In East Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Parts are managed as non-statutory nature reserves. Mostly common land.

**Description and Reasons for Notification:**

This is the largest block of lowland heath in Devon. It is a nationally important representative of the inland Atlantic-climate, lowland heathlands of Britain and north-west Europe. A significant feature of the site is the diversity of heathland-associated communities, related to its large area and the range of substrate and topography. It also supports a wide range of birds and invertebrates.

The site overlies Triassic Bunter Pebblebeds, with some New Red Sandstone and Permian Marls, within an altitude range of 70 m to 150 m. The higher and drier areas are covered with heath dominated by heather *Calluna vulgaris*, bell heather *Erica cinerea*, western gorse *Ulex gallii*, bristle bent-grass *Agrostis curtisii* and purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*. Grasses and bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* are prevalent in places as are bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg., and scrub with scattered pines *Pinus* spp. and birches *Betula* spp.

A series of shallow valleys gives rise to distinct changes of vegetation. The dry heath gives way to wet heath with flushes on the valley sides, and to valley mire with patches of willow *Salix* spp. scrub mainly on the valley floors. Bell heather is replaced by cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix* and characteristic species are common sedge *Carex nigra*, meadow thistle *Cirsium dissectum*, lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica*, bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*, heath spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza maculata*, lesser butterfly orchid *Platanthera bifolia* and sharp-flowered rush *Juncus acutiflorus*. Other species associated with the wetter areas are bog asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum*, sundews *Drosera* spp., pale butterwort *Pinguicula lusitanica*, bog pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*, common cottongrass *Eriophorum angustifolium* and the club-moss *Lycopodiella inundata*.

Mineral-rich flushes support tawny sedge *C. hostiana*, carnation sedge *C. panicea*, bog rush *Schoenus nigricans* and devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis* together

with the brown mosses *Sphagnum scorpioides*, *Campylium stellatum* and *Drepanocladus revolvens*.

Over 70 breeding bird species have been recorded notably nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*, hobby *Accipiter nisus* and in most years Dartford warbler *Sylvia undata*. Among the 21 breeding dragonfly species are the small red damselfly *Ceriagrion tenellum*, southern Coenagrion *Coenagrion mercuriale* and the downy emerald *Cordulea aenea*. The bog bush cricket *Metrioptera brachyptera* has been recorded here.