

File ref:

**County:** Hampshire      **Site Name:** Cheesefoot Head SSSI

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

**Local Planning Authority:** Hampshire County Council, Winchester City Council

**National Grid Reference:** SU 530279      **Area:** 12.9 (ha) 31.9 (ac)

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:** 185      **1:25,000:** SU 52

**Date Notified (Under 1949 Act):** 1951      **Date of Last Revision:** 1971

**Date Notified (Under 1981 Act):** 6 November 1986

**Date of Last Revision:** -

**Confirmed:** 12 March 1987

**Other Information:**

The site was extended in 1986 to include a small area of floristically rich chalk grassland and scrub.

**Reasons for Notification:**

Cheesefoot Head is a large area of steeply-sloping chalk downland around a predominantly north-facing horseshoe-shaped dry valley. Almost the whole of the site comprises species-rich turf, grazed at present (1985) by cattle and rabbits, though there is a deterioration of quality northwards on the west side, probably as a result of past agricultural improvements. The sward is mainly dominated by fescues *Festuca* species and bents *Agrostis* species but with the full range of characteristic downland grasses present. The rich herb complement includes such typical chalk-loving plants as dwarf thistle *Cirsium acaule*, felwort *Gentianella amarella*, small scabious *Scabiosa columbaria*, dropwort *Filipendula vulgaris*, kidney vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria* and cowslip *Primula veris*, together with several rather less common species, for example, early gentian *Gentianella anglica*, clustered bellflower *Campanula glomerata*, horseshoe vetch *Hippocrepis comosa*, fragrant orchid *Gymnadenia conopsea*, frog orchid *Coeloglossum viride* and the southern marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*, usually a wet meadow plant and occurring here in an anomalous downland site.

Cheesefoot Head is of particular ecological interest in having three clearly defined aspects (north-, east- and west-facing) within one relatively small management unit, each aspect exhibiting subtle differences in their plant communities. Further diversity is provided by the western extremity of the Site of Special Scientific Interest which comprises remarkably rich chalk grassland on a series of ancient hollow-ways. Of particular note here is an isolated but avigorous population of juniper *Juniperus communis* amongst mixed scrub, and a colony of the rare man orchid *Aceras anthropophorum*.

The site supports a colony of the rare and declining Duke of Burgundy *Hamearis lucina* butterfly: this is one of only 21 known colonies remaining in Hampshire.