

File ref:

**County:** Devon    **Site Name:** Hare's Down, Knowstone & Rackenford Moors

**District:** North 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, North Devon District Council

**National Grid Reference:** SS 847213    **Area:** 217.6 (ha) 537.7 (ac)

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:** 181    **1:10,000:** SS 82 SW, SE

**Date Notified (Under 1949 Act):** 1981    **Date of Last Revision:** 1981

**Date Notified (Under 1981 Act):** 1983    **Date of Last Revision:** 1988

**Other Information:**

Boundary amended by extension and deletion. Previously known as Haresdown and Knowstone Moors SSSI.

**Reasons for Notification:**

This is the largest area of diverse lowland-heathland remaining in North Devon. It supports both species-rich and species-poor heaths and some plant associations that are nationally rare. The rich flora and fauna include several uncommon and local species. The site represents a habitat that used to be widely distributed in England but is now very local and confined to the south-west.

The heathland overlies the Culm Measures which give rise to nutrient-poor acidic, impermeable soils with local base-rich areas. Much of the vegetation consists of species-rich, wet, dwarf-shrub heath dominated by purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, with cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix*, ling *Calluna vulgaris* and western gorse *Ulex gallii* sub-dominant. Other species include heath grass *Danthonia decumbens*, bristle bent *Agrostis curtisii*, devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, bog asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum* and heath-spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza maculata* subsp. *ericetorum*. A moss layer dominated by *Sphagnum* occurs over most of the area with *S. papillosum* and *S. compactum* being the commonest species.

Drier areas support habitats which range from species-poor dwarf-shrub heath, to more diverse heathland communities with common tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, heath grass, saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria*, sneezewort *Achillea ptarmica*, bell heather *Erica cinerea*, meadow thistle *Cirsium dissectum*, velvet bent *Agrostis canina*, sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina* and lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica*. In these drier areas the moss layer is poorly developed; there are small areas of bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and gorse *Ulex europaeus*.

Draining down the slopes to the River Sturcombe and a number of smaller streams which cross the site, are a number of flushes dominated by purple moor-grass with soft-rush *Juncus effusus* and sharp-flowered rush *J. acutiflorus* as sub-dominants. Associated species include wild angelica *Angelica sylvestris*, creeping bent *Agrostis stolonifera*, marsh thistle *Cirsium palustre*, bog violet *Viola palustris*, marsh bedstraw *Galium palustris*, ivy-leaved bell-flower *Wahlenbergia hederacea* and floating sweet-grass *Glyceria fluitans*. Bottle sedge *Carex rostrata* is locally abundant in the flushes on Rackenford Moor, growing in and amongst the purple moor-grass tussocks. The lower slopes of Rackenford Moor support scattered clumps of grey willow *Salix cinerea* and in the valley bottoms are small stands of the greater tussock-sedge *Carex paniculata* associated with mineral-rich ground water welling up to the surface.

Bog communities also occur, with bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*, bog pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*, white beak-sedge *Rhynchospora alba*, star sedge *Carex echinata*, common sedge *C. nigra*, marsh St John's-wort *Hypericum elodes* and the insectivorous round-leaved sundew *Drosera rotundifolia* and pale butterwort *Pinguicula lusitanica*.

A rich invertebrate fauna has been recorded here including the local small pearl-bordered fritillary *Boloria selene*, pearl-bordered fritillary *Boloria euphrosyne*, silver-washed fritillary *Argynnis paphia*, marsh fritillary *Eurodryas aurinia*, green hairstreak *Callophrys rubi*, purple hairstreak *Quercusia quercus*, marbled white *Melanargia galathea*, grizzled skipper *Pyrgus malvae* butterflies, and the nationally scarce weevil *Apoderus coryli* and silver-studded blue butterfly *Plebejus argus*.

The site supports an excellent complement of lowland breeding birds including curlew *Numenius arquata*, lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* and nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*. Wintering birds include Jack snipe *Lymnocyptes minimus* and woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*. The common lizard *Lacerta vivipara*, common toad *Bufo bufo*, common frog *Rana temporaria* and adder *Vipera berus* have all been recorded. Red deer *Cervus elaphus* are found in the area.