

File ref:

County: Somerset **Site Name:** The Perch

District: Sedgemoor

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

Local Planning Authority: Somerset County Council, Sedgemoor District Council

National Grid Reference: ST 454550 **Area:** 72.1 (ha) 178.2 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 182 **1:10,000:** ST 45 SE, NE

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1990 **Date of Last Revision:** –

Other Information:

A new site. Within Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

This site is important because it supports populations of nationally rare and scarce plants, together with grassland and woodland habitats which are nationally restricted in distribution. It is also of considerable interest for both its vertebrate and invertebrate fauna.

The site is located on the south side of the Mendip Hills occupying a position on a steep-sided ridge which runs north to south. The underlying rocks are almost entirely Carboniferous Limestone with a small amount of Triassic Dolomitic Conglomerate. The soils are predominantly shallow, calcareous loams of the Crwbin Series and there are frequent rock outcrops.

Much of the eastern- and western-facing slopes are covered in woodland dominated by ash *Fraxinus excelsior* with frequent pedunculate oak *Quercus robur*. Small-leaved lime *Tilia cordata* is present as large trees which have developed from old coppiced stools and where soils are thinnest with rock exposures and scree, yew *Taxus baccata* and whitebeam *Sorbus aria* are common species. The shrub layer varies greatly from areas of dense spinose shrubs such as hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* and areas of overgrown hazel *Corylus avellana* coppice, to more open areas where wild privet *Ligustrum vulgare*, wayfaring tree *Viburnum lantana*, dogwood *Cornus sanguinea* and spurge laurel *Daphne laureola* occur. The ground flora also varies. Under the dense shrub layer it is sparse but in the more open areas ivy *Hedera helix* and dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* are common. On the rockiest ground hart's-tongue fern *Phyllitis scolopendrium* and maidenhair spleenwort *Asplenium trichomanes* are abundant, and broad-leaved helleborine *Epipactis helleborine* is present. The nationally rare purple gromwell *Lithospermum purpureocaeruleum* and the nationally scarce ivy broomrape *Orobanche hederæ* also occur.

Much of the remainder of the site is covered by herb-rich calcareous grassland. The sward consists largely of grasses such as sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, meadow oat-grass *Avenula pratensis*, downy oat-grass *A. pubescens* and quaking grass *Briza media*. The most abundant herb-species are: common rock-rose *Helianthemum nummularium*, salad burnet *Sanguisorba minor*, lady's bedstraw *Galium verum*, wild thyme *Thymus praecox*, glaucous sedge *Carex flacca* and dwarf thistle *Cirsium acaule*. Three species of orchid occur in these grassland areas: green-winged orchid *Orchis morio*, pyramidal orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis* and autumn lady's tresses *Spiranthes spiralis*.

Towards the top of the slope where the soils are slightly deeper, coarser species of grass become more frequent; and here there is a large area of dense bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and bramble *Rubus fruticosus*. Hawthorn bushes are common in some areas of what was once more open grassland.

There are also areas of limestone heath where calcifugous plants such as heather *Calluna vulgaris*, bell heather *Erica cinerea*, western gorse *Ulex gallii*, slender St John's-wort *Hypericum pulchrum* and tormentil *Potentilla erecta* grow together with the calcicolous grassland plants listed above.

The vegetation associated with the unwooded rock outcrops is particularly important. Two nationally rare plants, Cheddar pink *Dianthus gratianopolitanus* and Cheddar bedstraw *Galium fleurotii* are found on this site, as are two nationally scarce species: rock stonecrop *Sedum forsterianum* and spring cinquefoil *Potentilla tabernaemontani*.

This variety of habitats ensures that a wide range of fauna occurs on the site. In total 22 species of mammal have been recorded including a strong population of dormouse *Muscardinus avellanarius* and five species of bat, including greater horseshoe bat *Rhinolophus ferrumequinum* and lesser horseshoe bat *R. hipposideros* which use the site for feeding. One small roost of lesser horseshoe bats is known. Both species of horseshoe bat are nationally rare.

Thirty species of birds are known to breed within this site and at least 23 species of butterfly breed here including small pearl-bordered fritillary *Boloria selene*, green hairstreak *Callophrys rubi*, brown argus *Aricia agestis*, dark green fritillary *Argynnis aglaja*, marbled white *Melanargia galathea* and grayling *Hipparchia semele*.

Several species of Orthoptera including striped-winged grasshopper *Stenobothrus lineatus* and great green bush cricket *Tettigonia viridissima* are known to inhabit the grassland.