

County: Devon **Site Name:** Maiden Down

District: Mid 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, Mid Devon District Council

National Grid Reference: ST 088160 **Area:** 39.43 (ha) 97.4 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 181 **1:10,000:** ST 01 NE

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

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

Other Information:

Registered common land unit 88.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Maiden Down is of special interest for its lowland heath plant and animal communities. The site supports a rich invertebrate fauna which includes several nationally scarce species of insect.

Lying within an altitude range of 130 to 162 m the site occupies a shallow hollow underlain by Triassic sandstones. This is overlain by a generally sandy soil with a peaty surface horizon in places. The lower slopes are affected by groundwater.

A dry heathland vegetation occupies the higher, freely-drained parts of the site. This is characterised by a mosaic of heather *Calluna vulgaris*, bell heather *Erica cinerea*, bristle bent *Agrostis curtisii*, and western gorse *Ulex gallii*. In places dense stands of bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and European gorse *U. europaeus* occur. Towards the valley bottom the influence of the groundwater and poorer drainage conditions are reflected in the vegetation by the development of wet heathland. Here purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* and cross-leaved heath *E. tetralix* become more prevalent, together with many other plant species including meadow thistle *Cirsium dissectum*, devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica*, sedges *Carex* spp. and rushes *Juncus* spp. In the wettest parts boggy vegetation occurs with bog mosses *Sphagnum* spp., marsh violet *Viola palustris*, bog asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum*, sundews *Drosera intermedia* and *D. rotundifolia*, common cottongrass *Eriophorum angustifolium* and bog St John's-wort *Hypericum elodes*.

There is a rich invertebrate fauna associated with the site. Five species of fritillary butterfly have been recorded, including the local small pear-bordered fritillary *Boloria selene* and marsh fritillary *Eurdodryas aurinia*. The nationally scarce silver-studded blue butterfly *Plebejus argus* and small grass emerald moth *Chlorissa viridata* are also present.