

COUNTY: DORSET SITE NAME: WAREHAM COMMON

DISTRICT: PURBECK

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

Local Planning Authority: PURBECK DISTRICT COUNCIL, Dorset County Council

National Grid Reference: SY 916875 Area: 17.38 (ha.) 42.95 (ac.)
 SY 914878
 SY 909874

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 195 1:10,000: SY 98 NW

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1992 Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

A new site.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Wareham Common is an area of grazing marsh, divided into three blocks, lying in the flood plain of the River Piddle. The river, a chalk stream in its upper catchment, influences the site with base-rich flood water, whereas the immediate catchment provides acidic ground water from soils derived from the Bagshot Beds. The prevalence of acidic or base-rich waters has resulted in considerable variation in plant communities present. All three areas support herb-rich, unimproved grassland communities which are now uncommon both in Dorset and nationally.

The eastern-most grassland adjoins the River Piddle and is the most frequently flooded in winter. The sward is mesotrophic in character, showing affinities to the Crested Dog's-tail – Marsh-marigold *Cynosurus cristatus* – *Caltha palustris* flooded pasture community type. The dominant grasses are Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus* and Meadow Fescue *Festuca pratensis* with rather less Crested Dog's-tail and Creeping Bent *Agrostis stolonifera*. Cuckooflower *Cardamine pratensis* and Marsh-marigold are frequent.

The northern meadows are more distant from the river and show more influence of acidic drainage water. Jointed Rush *Juncus articulatus* and Soft Rush *J. effusus* are abundant in the sward with occasional Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*. Carnation Sedge *Carex panicea* and Common Sedge *C. nigra* are frequent, as are the herbs Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis* and Meadow Thistle *Cirsium dissectum*. Of particular note is the presence of the nationally scarce Whorled Caraway *Carum verticillatum*, known only from one other Dorset site, and the abundance of the moss *Climacium dendroides* in the sward.

The western-most grassland is the most heavily influenced by the acidic catchment and supports a fen meadow community of the uncommon Purple Moor-grass – Meadow Thistle type. Purple Moor-grass is abundant and Quaking Grass *Briza media*, Heath

Grass *Danthonia decumbens* and Sweet Vernal Grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* are all frequent. Common Sedge, Carnation Sedge and Yellow Sedge *C. demissa* are also common. The sward has a high proportion of herbs with Devil's-bit Scabious, Lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica*, Marsh Pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris* and Bog Pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*. The lower lying areas have Marsh Cinquefoil *Potentilla palustris*, whilst a more acidic character is reflected in the local occurrence of Bog Mosses *Sphagnum* spp., Round-leaved Sundew *Drosera rotundifolia* and small quantities of Cross-leaved Heath *Erica tetralix* and Petty Whin *Genista anglica*.

Ditches are present in all three sections and contribute to the floristic and faunal interest of the site. Plants occurring in these ditches include Broad-leaved Pondweed *Potamogeton natans*, Arrowhead *Sagittaria sagittifolia*, Water Dock *Rumex hydrolapathum*, Whorl-grass *Catabrosa aquatica* and Floating Club-rush *Eleogiton fluitans*.

The fauna of the site is not known in detail but the ditches support a variety of dragonflies and the meadows have strong populations of grasshoppers including Lesser Marsh Grasshopper *Chorthippus albomarginatus*.