

County: Devon

Site Name: Small Brook

District: Torridge

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

Local Planning Authority: Torridge District Council
Devon County Council

National Grid Reference: SS 313065 **Area:** 14.7 (ha) 36.4 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 190 **1:10,000:** SS 30 NW

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1991 **Date of Last Revision:** –

Other Information:

This is a new site.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Small Brook is important for its traditionally managed, oceanic, acidic grassland, mire and fen meadow communities. Collectively these communities are known as Culm Grassland, a wildlife habitat which is becoming increasingly rare throughout western Britain. The site is of particular importance for its fen meadow communities, which are especially species-rich.

The site comprises five fields situated on either side of a stream overlying the Carboniferous shales of the Culm Measures of north Devon, about 3 km north-west of Holsworthy. The soils are acidic clays with restricted or poor drainage, on gently sloping ground.

The site supports an extensive area of species-rich purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* sward with abundant meadow thistle *Cirsium dissectum*, devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, carnation sedge *Carex panicea* and whorled caraway *Carum verticillatum*, a species which is virtually confined in England to north-west Devon. Other associated species include saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria*, greater bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus uliginosus* and heath spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza maculata*.

In places there is a distinct heathy element to the sward with species such as lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica*, cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix*, flea sedge *Carex pulicaris*, star sedge *C. echinata*, tawny sedge *C. hostiana* and the locally uncommon petty whin *Genista anglica*.

Local surface water movement gives rise to patches of soft-rush *Juncus effusus*, with marsh violet *Viola palustris* and the nationally scarce wavy St John's-wort *Hypericum undulatum*, a species found in England only in Devon and Cornwall.

There is a small area of unmanaged mire at the western end of the site with tall purple moor-grass tussocks, showing bramble *Rubus fruticosus* and other scrub invasion.

The nationally scarce marsh fritillary butterfly *Eurodryas aurinia* is present.