

COUNTY: Devon

SITE NAME: BULMOOR PASTURES & COPPICE

DISTRICT: East 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, East Devon District Council

National Grid Reference: SY 297937                      Area: 24.1 (ha) 59.6 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 193                      1:10,000: SY 29 SE, SY 39 SW

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

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

Other Information:

A new site, within East Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

### **Description and Reasons for Notification:**

This site contains, in close proximity to one another, species-rich representative examples of certain types of ancient semi-natural woodland, calcareous grassland and spring-line mires which are nationally either scarce or rare, and which are continuing to decline in extent.

The site occupies the eastern end of a valley within which flows a small tributary of the River Axe, and consists largely of south-west facing slopes at altitudes ranging from 100–400m AOD. The land is set at the junction of Greensand (below Clay with Flints) and the Rhaetic Beds (above Keuper Marl), at which point numerous acid-water flushes emerge to flow over the base-rich lower slopes of the valley sides. This complex geology and hydrology gives rise to an exceptional combination of acid-loving plants existing side by side, resulting in communities which are particularly diverse and which moreover contain species which are rare or local in Devon. The woodland, comprising Bulmoor and Ten-Acre coppices, contains two distinct community types. The first of these, Ten-Acre Coppice, is located mainly on calcareous soils and is dominated by Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and Pendunculate Oak *Quercus robur*, over a shrub layer consisting mainly of Hazel *Corylus avellana* and Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, but with Holly *Ilex aquifolium*, Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, Goat Willow *Salix caprea* and Honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum* also present. The ground flora is particularly diverse, and contains 26 species indicative of ancient semi-natural woodland. In spring, the woodland floor is carpeted by Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, a particular attribute of British woods in the European context.

Dog's Mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, Wood Anemone *Anemone nemorosa* and Yellow Archangel *Lamiastrum galeobdolon* are also frequent, with Greater Butterfly-orchid *Platanthera chlorantha*, uncommon in Devon, and Common Twayblade *Listera ovata* also present. Also of note is the presence of the rare lichen *Lecanactis lyncea*.

Located on the flushed slopes of Bulmoor Coppice below the spring-line and to a lesser extent along the stream in the valley bottom, is an exceptionally large area of ancient Alder *Alnus glutinosa* dominated woodland. A few Ash and Grey Willow *Salix cinerea* still share the canopy with the Alder, while the shrub layer is sparse, composed of Hazel, Elder *Sambucus nigra* and Grey Willow. The soil is a waterlogged peaty humus, and supports a rich and varied ground flora consisting of low-growing fen species among prominent tussocks of Greater Tussock-sedge *Carex paniculata*. Creeping Buttercup *Ranunculus repens* and Great Horsetail *Equisetum telmateia* are abundant, with Yellow Archangel, Dog's Mercury and Opposite-leaved Golden-saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* also

present. Though not characteristic of the community type concerned, Water Mint *Mentha aquatica*, Bugle *Ajuga reptans* and Bittersweet *Solanum dulcamara* are also found in some quantity. The woodland also supports breeding Dormice\* *Muscardinus avellanarius* a species which is now nationally uncommon.

In one of the fields, where the slopes are strongly flushed, well developed spring-line mire communities occur. Here, Star Sedge *Carex echinata*, Greater Tussock-sedge, Sharp-flowered Rush *Juncus acutiflorus* and Soft-rush *J. effusus* dominate, with frequent Bog Pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*, Marsh Pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus uliginosus*, Common Marsh-bedstraw *Galium palustre*, Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, Yellow Iris *Iris pseudacorus* and Ragged-Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*. A diverse sedge flora includes Carnation Sedge *C. demissa*, Flea Sedge *C. pulicaris*, Smooth stalked-sedge *C. laevigata* and Pale Sedge *C. pallescens*, the last two both uncommon species in Devon. Other notable plants include Marsh Lousewort *Pedicularis palustris*, a local plant in Devon, and the moss *Philonotis caespitosa*, only known at one other location in southern Devon. A striking feature of the mire is the presence of many marsh and spotted orchids, including Southern marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*, Heath Spotted-orchid *D. maculata* and Common Spotted-orchid *D. fuchsii*. The mire also supports a large colony of the scarce Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary butterfly *Boloria selene*.

The other two fields support herb-rich calcareous grassland, characterised by Downy Oat-grass *Avenula pubescens*, Red Fescue *Festuca rubra* and Cocks-foot *Dactylis glomerata* with frequent Heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens*, Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus*, Common Bent *Agrostis capillaries* and Sweet Vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*. Amongst the herbs are Common Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis*, Common Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, Betony *Stachys officinalis*, Pignut *Conopodium majus*, Spring-segde *Carex caryophyllea*, Glaucous Sedge *C. flacca* and Common Milkwort *Polygala vulgaris*. This represents a community type now nationally scarce due to agricultural improvement, and which is known at only one other small site in Devon. Corky-fruited Water-dropwort *Oenanthe pimpinelloides*, a nationally scarce species, is found scattered along the lower slopes of the two fields. The presence of large and numerous ant-hills in one of the fields suggests that it has not been cultivated for many decades.

\* Species listed in Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.