

COUNTY: DEVON

SITE NAME: OCCOMBE

DISTRICT: SOUTH WEST

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, Torbay Borough Council

National Grid Reference: SX 876634

Area: 11.9 (ha.) 29.4 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 202

1:10,000: SX 86 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): –

Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1992

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

New site.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

This site consists of five herb-rich, unimproved meadows, supporting grassland communities which are now restricted both nationally and in Devon due to agricultural intensification. A range of grassland types are represented within the site, from a dry, well-drained sward to poorly-drained marshy areas bordering the stream which runs the length of the site. Numerous wet flushes add further diversity, as does an area of ancient semi-natural woodland and adjacent tall herb fen and carr vegetation which links the unimproved fields.

The gently sloping fields, sited at an altitude of 100m above O.D., are located across the boundary between Devonian slates and shales, and Permian conglomerates, breccias, and sandstones. The geology is further complicated by a fault which cuts across the site and gives rise to localised exposures of Devonian limestone. This has resulted in a generally acid to neutral site with variable drainage which is impeded in part, but with an increasingly calcareous influence towards the western end.

The majority of the herb-rich grassland is neutral and is characterised by Crested Dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* and Common Knapweed *Centaurea nigra* with frequent Heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens*. Typical herbs of this community are Common Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, Field-woodrush *Luzula campestris* and Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis*. Eight species of sedge have been recorded including Spring-sedge *Carex caryophyllea* and Flea Sedge *C. pulicaris*. Where the well-drained grassland communities merge into the frequent wet flushes, the vegetation becomes characteristically taller and is dominated by Rough Meadow-grass *Poa trivialis* and Floating Sweet-grass *Glyceria fluitans*. Marsh Valerian *Valeriana dioica*, a local plant species in Devon, Ragged Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi* and Marsh-marigold *Caltha palustris* are frequent here, and are also found together with Yellow Iris *Iris pseudacorus* in the waterlogged streamside habitats. Elsewhere, as the vegetation merges into the damp grassland typical of such meadows of undulating topography, Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria* and Rushes *Juncus* spp. become increasingly frequent, the dominant grasses being Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus* and Tufted Hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa*.

An important feature of the site is the number of orchid species which includes the Green-winged Orchid *Orchis morio*, a very local plant in Devon with a restricted

distribution nationally, and the Common Spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, also with a restricted distribution in Devon.

The central portion of the site is occupied by a small area of predominantly wet woodland, characterized by Alder *Alnus glutinosa* and Grey Willow *Salix cinerea* subsp. *cinerea*, and supporting a ground flora in places dominated by Hemlock Water-dropwort *Oenanthe crocata* and Common Nettle *Urtica dioica*, whilst elsewhere it is more varied and includes Yellow Pimpernel *Lysimachia nemorum*, Marsh-marigold and Meadowsweet. Towards the edges of the wooded area, where the soils are more freely drained, the canopy is composed of Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur* with a Hazel *Corylus avellana* understorey. Here a ground flora more typical of ancient woodlands is present, with Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scriptas*, Sanicle *Sanicula europaeas* and Moschatel *Adoxa moschatellina*.

The site supports the Marbled White butterfly *Melanargia galathea* as well as the Great Green Bush Cricket *Tettigonia viridissima* both of which are restricted to the south and west of Britain.