

COUNTY: HEREFORD & WORCESTER

SITE NAME: MIDLAND PLATEAU
GRASSLANDS, 10 RANTERS
BANK PASTURES

DISTRICT: WYRE FOREST

SITE REF: 15 P23

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

Local Planning Authority: HEREFORD AND WORCESTER COUNTY COUNCIL, Wyre Forest District Council

National Grid Reference: SO 723749

Area: 2.15 (ha.) 5.31 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 138

1:10,000: SO 77 SW & NW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 31 March 1995

Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): –

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

New site.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Ranters Bank is a traditionally managed smallholding located in north Worcestershire, within the dispersed Worcestershire village of Far Forest, Rock. The pastures slope to the west towards the Lem Brook, which forms the county boundary with Shropshire. The site overlies the Upper Carboniferous Coal Measures, which give rise to neutral to acidic soils.

The special interest of this site lies in the diversity of the semi-natural grassland sward which has been maintained under traditional management by light grazing. The dominant vegetation is mesotrophic (neutral) grassland characterised by common knapweed *Centaurea nigra* and crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, a nationally scarce and declining grassland type. The proximity of Ranters Bank to the Wyre Forest is likely to provide an important wood-edge habitat.

The northern pasture conforms to the heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens* sub-community, dominated by common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, yellow oat-grass *Trisetum flavescens* and red fescue *Festuca rubra*. Abundant herbs in the sward include common bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, cowslip *Primula veris*, pignut *Conopodium majus* and devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, with burnet-saxifrage *Pimpinella saxifraga*, common spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* and rough hawkbit *Leontodon hispidus* all occurring frequently. The acidic nature of the sward is demonstrated by the presence of lousewort *Pedicularis sylvaticus*, tormentil *Potentilla erecta* and betony *Stachys officinalis*. There is also a woodland influence with bugle *Ajuga reptans* and bitter-vetch *Lathyrus montanus* both present. The pasture contains a number of locally uncommon species, including lady's mantle *Alchemilla filicaulis* ssp. *vestita* and heath spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza maculata*.

The southern pasture, which includes an old cherry orchard *Prunus avium*, conforms to the meadow vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis* sub-community with characteristic species including frequent yellow rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, common sorrel *Rumex acetosa*, oxeye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, pignut, black medick *Medicago lupulina*, meadow vetchling, tufted vetch *Vicia cracca* and lady's bedstraw *Galium verum*.

An additional feature of value is that the field boundaries are formed by species-rich hedges with ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, holly *Ilex aquifolium*, hazel *Corylus avellana* and small trees, particularly damsons *Prunus domestica*. A small area of

woodland adjoining the brook forms part of the boundary of the northern field, containing ash, birch *Betula pendula* and alder *Alnus glutinosus*.

The invertebrate fauna of the grassland is rich and includes the locally uncommon dingy skipper *Erynnis tages*, plus meadow brown *Maniola jurtina* and ringlet *Aphantopus hyperantus* butterflies.