

COUNTY: HEREFORD & WORCESTER

SITE NAME: MIDLAND PLATEAU  
GRASSLANDS, 13. BLISS GATE  
PASTURES

DISTRICT: WYRE FOREST

SITE REF: 15P23

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 746734

Area: 1.95 (ha.) 4.82 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 138

1:10,000: SO 77 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): –

Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 31 March 1995

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

New site.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Bliss Gate Pastures are situated in north Worcestershire, to the south of the Wyre Forest in an area of dispersed smallholding settlements. The two pastures are steeply sloping and west facing, overlying 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 site conforms to the mesotrophic (neutral) grassland type characterised by common knapweed *Centaurea nigra* and crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, a type which is nationally scarce and declining.

The two fields adjoin each other. The northern pasture has an abundance of herbs with infrequent grasses. Common knapweed and devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, dominate the sward with at lower frequency, lady's bedstraw *Galium verum*, mouse-ear hawkweed *Hieracium pilosella*, autumn hawkbit *Leontodon autumnalis*, rough hawkbit *L. hispidus*, oxeye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, common bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, selfheal *Prunella vulgaris*, meadow buttercup *Ranunculus acris* and germander speedwell *Veronica chamaedrys*. Several spring-line seepages give rise to damp areas with common yellow sedge *Carex demissa*, carnation sedge *C. panicea*, bog stitchwort *Stellaria alsine*, bristle club-rush *Isolepis setacea*, jointed rush *Juncus articulatus*, and ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*; such features have become much rarer due to lowered water tables.

Anthills of the yellow meadow ant *Lasius flavus* occur throughout the pasture and have associated herb species including wild thyme *Thymus praecox*, heath milkwort *Polygala serpyllifolia* and barren strawberry *Potentilla sterilis*. Towards the top of the slope there is a zone of scrub with hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, western gorse *Ulex gallii* and ash *Fraxinus excelsior*.

In the southern pasture the sward corresponds to the heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens* sub-community of the mesotrophic (neutral) grassland type in a transition towards the acidic sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina*–common bent *Agrostis capillaris*–heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile* grassland community. The sward is dominated by common bent, red fescue *Festuca rubra* and Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus*. The herb flora is exceptionally

diverse with no single species dominant. Species present include wild carrot *Daucus carota*, eyebright *Euphrasia officinalis*, oxeye daisy, fairy flax *Linum catharticum*, betony *Stachys officinalis*, field scabious *Knautia arvensis*, common bird's-foot-trefoil, burnet-saxifrage *Pimpinella saxifraga*, devil's-bit scabious, and wild thyme. The acidic element to the flora includes heather *Calluna vulgaris*, bell heather *Erica cinerea* and tormentil *Potentilla erecta*.

A special feature of the southern pasture is the abundance of many locally uncommon species including bristle club-rush, dyer's greenweed *Genista tinctoria*, common restharrow *Ononis repens*, and the largest population of green-winged orchid *Orchis morio* in north Worcestershire.

Scrub forms an important element to part of the site in a former orchard area, with western gorse, hawthorn, sessile oak *Quercus petraea*, alder *Alnus glutinosa* and hazel *Corylus avellana* scrub merging into woodland, providing an important wood-edge zone for breeding birds and invertebrates. Other field boundaries are formed by species-rich hedges with mature sessile oak trees, hawthorn, hazel, elder *Sambucus nigra*, blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* and holly *Ilex aquifolium*.

The invertebrate fauna includes small skipper *Thymelicus flavus*, gatekeeper *Pyronia tithonus*, meadow brown *Maniola jurtina* and common blue *Polyommatus icarus* butterflies, and the chimney sweeper moth *Odezia atrata*.