

COUNTY: HEREFORD & WORCESTER SITE NAME: BIRMINGHAM PLATEAU
GRASSLANDS, 1 NINE HOLES
MEADOWS

DISTRICT: LEOMINSTER

SITE REF: 15 P1Z

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,
Leominster District Council

National Grid Reference: SO 610671

Area: 3.94 (ha.) 9.74 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 138

1:10,000: SO 66 NW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): –

Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 22.2.94

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

New site.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Nine Holes Meadows are located on the north-west border of Worcestershire approximately two kilometres south-east of Tenbury Wells, mainly on a south-west facing slope. Since 1992 the two large meadows have been cut for hay, which has not occurred regularly in the past. The two other meadows are grazed by cattle, and topped as necessary. The south-east corner has grassland under an old orchard and the site also contains a small area of woodland and scrub. The meadows lie on neutral soils derived from the underlying Old Red Sandstone of the Triassic Period.

The special interest of the site lies in the diversity of the semi-natural grassland sward. The vegetation conforms with the mesotrophic (neutral) grassland characterised by crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* and common knapweed *Centaurea nigra*. The most frequent grasses throughout the site are common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, red fescue *Festuca rubra* and Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus*, with common bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* and yarrow *Achillea millefolium*.

The western meadow is an excellent herb-rich grassland on a steep bank conforming to the heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens* sub-community at the western end on the lower slopes, where common bent and red fescue are abundant. Frequent species present include dyer's greenweed *Genista tinctoria*, devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, tormentil *Potentilla erecta* and betony *Stachys officinalis*. There is a sharp transition zone higher on the bank to the lady's bedstraw *Galium verum* sub-community, with hoary plantain *Plantago media*, field scabious *Knautia arvensis*, common restharrow *Ononis repens*, lady's mantle *Alchemilla vulgaris* agg., greater knapweed *Centaurea scabiosa* and cowslip *Primula veris* all frequent to abundant.

The central meadow generally conforms to the meadow vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis* sub-community, with common bird's-foot-trefoil and red clover *Trifolium pratense*. A small area conforms to the lady's bedstraw sub-community, with agrimony *Agrimonia eupatoria*, glaucous sedge *Carex flacca*, hoary plantain and salad burnet *Sanguisorbia minor*.

The large eastern meadow conforms to the lady's bedstraw sub-community with Yorkshire-fog, red fescue and sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, and the herbs agrimony, common bird's-foot-trefoil and yarrow.

The south-western meadow is a steep bank leading down to the brook, with occasional ant-bills. It comprises a mosaic of the lady's bedstraw and heath-grass sub-communities. In addition to characteristic species such as common knapweed and common bent, species such as wild thyme *Thymus praecox*, devil's-bit scabious and betony occur. The damper vegetation at the bottom of the bank includes hard rush *Juncus inflexus* and wild angelica *Angelica sylvestris*. It has over seventy spikes of the nationally scarce greater broomrape *Orobranche rapum-genistae*; this is one of the largest colonies in the county.

The orchard contains apple *Malus domestica* and pear *Pyrus communis* trees, while boundary hedges include hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* and ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, together with mature white willow *Salix alba* and field maple *Acer campestre*. A small brook forms the south-west boundary.