

SITE NAME: **BIRMINGHAM PLATEAU GRASSLANDS
5. PENORCHARD AND SPRING FARM PASTURES**

File Ref: **SO98/2**

DISTRICT: **BROMSGROVE**

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
Bromsgrove District Council**

National Grid Reference: **SO 942812** Area: **15.37 (ha.) 37.96 (ac.)**
SO 945810

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: **139**

1:10,000: **SO 98 SW**

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act):

Date of Last Revision:

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): **22.2.94**

Date of Last Revision: **31.3.95**

Other Information: Renotification with extension to site

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Penorchard and Spring Farm Pastures are the most northerly of the Birmingham Plateau Grasslands, and are situated on the side of the Clent Hills at an altitude of 210m, less than one kilometre due south of the village of Hayley Green. The underlying Keele beds of the Upper Coal Measures of the Carboniferous Period give rise to poorly drained neutral to acidic soils. All the pastures slope to the north east, with two of the pastures overlying ridge and furrow. Light grazing by horses for over twenty years has produced a species-rich sward typical of this form of management.

The special interest of the site lies in the diversity of the semi-natural grassland sward. The vegetation conforms to the mesotrophic (neutral) grassland characterised by crested dog's-tail (*Cynosurus cristatus*) and common knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*), a type which is nationally scarce and declining.

Spring Farm Pasture and the adjacent three Penorchard Pastures largely conform to the heath-grass (*Danthonia decumbens*) sub-community, dominated by common bent (*Agrostis capillaris*) and red fescue (*Festuca rubra*). In Spring Farm Pasture, betony (*Stachys officinalis*), meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*) and cowslip (*Primula veris*) are abundant, with lady's-mantle (*Alchemilla filicaulis* ssp. *vestita*), devil's-bit scabious (*Succisa pratensis*) and common bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*) frequent.

The southern of the three adjacent pastures is a mosaic of the meadow vetchling (*Lathyrus pratensis*) sub-community and the heath-grass sub-community. Characteristic of the meadow vetchling sub-community are common bird's-foot-trefoil, red clover (*Trifolium pratense*), zigzag clover (*T. medium*) and perennial rye-grass (*Lolium perenne*). Other characteristic

species include yellow rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*), lesser hawkbit (*Leontodon taraxacoides*) and common spotted-orchid (*Dactylorhiza fuschii*). The damp areas have compact rush (*Juncus conglomeratus*), toad rush (*J. bufonius*), jointed rush (*J. articulatus*), bristle clubrush (*Isolepis setacea*) and oval sedge (*Carex ovalis*). The other two pastures are typical of the heath-grass sub-community, with abundant red fescue, common bent, sweet vernal-grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*) and Yorkshire-fog (*Holcus lanatus*). Herbs present include tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*), devil's-bit scabious, autumn hawkbit (*Leontodon autumnalis*), betony, common fleabane (*Pulicaria dysenterica*), common spotted-orchid, selfheal (*Prunella vulgaris*) and eyebright (*Euphrasia spp.*).

The four western fields form a separate block. These also conform largely to the heath-grass sub-community, with abundant common bent, crested dog's-tail, common knapweed, common bird's-foot-trefoil and common spotted-orchid. Three fields have frequent lesser hawkbit, bitter vetch (*Lathyrus montanus*), selfheal, and autumn hawkbit. The eastern field of this group contains more diverse soil types including some calcareous (base-rich) areas. These give rise to plants such as yellow-wort (*Blackstonia perfoliata*) and common centaury (*Centaureum erythraea*) mixed with the typically more acidic flora. A small area of scrub along the southern boundary contains a large population of the locally uncommon violet helleborine (*Epipactis purpurata*) and the broad-leaved helleborine (*E. helleborine*).

All of the fields have spring-line seepages and associated damp areas with species including water mint (*Mentha aquatica*), ragged-robin (*Lychnis flos-cuculi*), jointed rush, greater bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus uliginosus*) and lesser spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*). The locally uncommon species dyer's greenweed (*Genista tinctoria*) occurs in two of the pastures.

The pastures are bounded by hedges dominated by hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*). There is also a wooded stream to the south east.

Invertebrates recorded include the meadow brown (*Maniola jurtina*) and small skipper (*Thymelicus flexus*) butterflies, with both five and six spot burnet moths (*Zygaena filipendulae* and *Z. trifolii*) and the chimney sweeper moth (*Odezia atrata*).