

COUNTY: HEREFORD & WORCESTER

SITE NAME: HURCOTT PASTURE

DISTRICT: WYRE FOREST

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 848778

Area: 4.69 (ha.) 11.59 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 138

1:10,000: SO 87 NE & NW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): –

Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 10 October 1995

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

New site.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Hurcott Pasture is situated in north Worcestershire, on the eastern edge of the town of Kidderminster. The pasture lies on sloping ground overlying the Bunter Sandstones of the Triassic Period, which give rise to nutrient-poor free-draining soils.

The special interest lies in the size of the site and in the particular character and diversity of the semi-natural grassland sward which has been maintained by grazing, and is of a type which is nationally scarce and declining through agricultural improvement, development and neglect. The vegetation over most of the site conforms with the acidic grassland community characterised by sheep's-fescue *Festuca ovina*, common bent *Agrostis capillaris* and sheep's sorrel *Rumex acetosella*. Most surviving examples of this community in southern Britain are small and fragmented.

The soil is shallow in places which gives rise to an open sward characterised by an ephemeral spring flora. Species found include early hair-grass *Aira praecox*, changing forget-me-not *Myosotis discolor*, parsley-piert *Aphanes arvensis*, common whitlowgrass *Erophila verna* and common mouse-ear *Cerastium fontanum*. Both bird's-foot *Ornithopus perpusillus* and common stork's-bill *Erodium cicutarium* are abundant and form a distinctive feature of the sward. Lower plants also are a particular feature and include the mosses *Polytrichum juniperinum*, *Ceratodon purpureus*, *Brachythecium albicans* and lichens *Cladonia* spp.

A number of locally uncommon or rare species occur including field mouse-ear *Cerastium arvense*, little mouse-ear *C. semidecandrum*, spring vetch *Vicia lathyroides* and sand spurrey *Spergularia rubra*.

On deeper soil the sward is of a neutral grassland type dominated by common bent, red fescue *Festuca rubra*, sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, bulbous buttercup *Ranunculus bulbosus*, sheep's sorrel *Rumex acetosella*, ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, lesser dandelion *Taraxacum erythrosperma* agg., cat's-ear *Hypochaeris radicata*, soft clover *Trifolium striatum*, and lesser trefoil *T. dubium*. Other species occurring less frequently include dove's-foot crane's-bill *Geranium molle*, mouse-ear hawkweed *Hieracium pilosella*, field wood-rush *Luzula campestris* and white campion *Silene alba*.

Part of the site has an area of gorse *Ulex europaeus* scrub which provides habitat for birds and invertebrates. Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* hedges form boundaries to part of the site.