

COUNTY: WORCESTERSHIRE

SITE NAME: BURLEY DENE MEADOWS

DISTRICT: MALVERN HILLS

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

Local Planning Authority: WORCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL, Malvern Hills District Council

National Grid Reference: SO 814325      Area: 17.13 (ha.) 42.31 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 150      1:10,000: SO 83 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): –      Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 15.3.94      Date of Last Revision: 9 October 1998

Other Information:

Major extension to, and renotification and renaming of land previously notified as Severn Valley Grasslands 6. Marshlands Meadow SSSI. Within the Longdon and Eldersfield Internal Drainage Board Area.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Burley Dene Meadows are situated in south Worcestershire, one kilometre to the north-east of the village of Eldersfield and within the floodplain of the Marsh Brook. The six fields lie on level ground that was formerly part of Eldersfield Marsh which, with the nearby Longdon Marsh, was drained within the last hundred years. The underlying alluvial deposits of the Pleistocene Period give rise to neutral soils, with calcareous elements.

The special interest of the site lies in the large area, high naturalness and floristic diversity of the unimproved grassland, which has been maintained through traditional management by hay cutting and light grazing. The major vegetation type is mesotrophic (neutral) grassland characterised by meadow foxtail *Alopecurus pratensis* and great burnet *Sanguisorba officinalis*, a type which is nationally scarce and declining and recognised as a rare habitat in Europe in the 1992 Habitats Directive.

Dominant grasses include red fescue *Festuca rubra*, Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus*, sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*. Glaucous sedge *Carex flacca*, hard rush *Juncus inflexus* and jointed rush *J. articulatus* are frequent in the sward. Yellow rattle *Rhinanthus minor* is an abundant component, and other frequently occurring herb species include great burnet, tufted vetch *Vicia cracca*, greater bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus uliginosus*, meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria* and pepper-saxifrage *Silaum silaus*.

The wettest field has frequent lesser pond-sedge *Carex acutiformis*, with purple loosestrife *Lythrum salicaria*, ragged-robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi* and common meadow-rue *Thalictrum flavum*, which is locally scarce. Corky-fruited water-dropwort *Oenanthe*

*pimpinelloides*, a nationally uncommon species near the northern limit of its British distribution and in the Midlands closely associated with the Severn & Avon Vales Natural Area, is also frequent.

In drier parts of the site the sward conforms to the mesotrophic (neutral) grassland community characterised by common knapweed *Centaurea nigra* and crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, which is also nationally scarce and declining. Upright brome *Bromus erectus* and quaking-grass *Briza media* are frequent in these areas, reflecting a calcareous influence on the soil chemistry. Herbs present include cowslip *Primula veris*, common bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, adder's-tongue *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, bulbous buttercup *Ranunculus bulbosus*, common restharrow *Ononis repens*, dyer's greenweed *Genista tinctoria* and green-winged orchid *Orchis morio*. One area is unusual in the abundance of dyer's greenweed and the frequency of common dog-violet *Viola riviniana* in the sward.

Features that add further to the interest of the site include several ponds and the old, mature and species-rich hedges dominated by hawthorn *Crateagus monogyna* which surround the fields; trees within these hedgerows include a number of veteran oaks *Quercus robur* and black poplar *Populus nigra* pollards; the latter species is one of Britain's rarest native trees and is a link with the historical wet woodland vegetation of the locality. Some of the thicker hedges resemble small strips of woodland, with a ground flora including bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* and false brome *Brachypodium sylvaticum*.