

SITE NOTIFIED TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE ON THE 17TH DECEMBER 1986

COUNTY: DORSET

SITE NAME: HURN COMMON

DISTRICT: WIMBORNE, CHRISTCHURCH

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

Local Planning Authority: Wimborne District Council, Christchurch Borough Council, Dorset County Council

National Grid Reference: SU 125015

Area: c. 532 (ha.) c. 1315 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 195

1:10,000: SZ 19 NW, SU 10 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1977

Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Includes the area formerly notified as St. Leonards Common. Heathland formerly part of Moors River SSSI has been transferred to this site. Boundary amended by extension and deletion.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

This site lies close to the Moors River and River Avon, mainly on Bracklesham Beds with smaller areas of Plateau Gravels and Bagshot Beds. Although now separated into several fragments, it forms one of the largest remaining expanses of heathland in the county. Dry and wet heathland types are well represented, there are interesting areas of acidic grassland, and there is a rich associated fauna. The site forms an important link between the heaths of the New Forest, and other heathlands of South East Dorset.

The dry heathland, dominated by ling *Calluna vulgaris*, has smaller amounts of bell heather *Erica cinerea* and the typical dwarf gorse of East Dorset, *Ulex minor*. Common gorse *Ulex europaeus* is present in dense and scattered stands and rather large areas of the drier heath have been invaded by pines *Pinus spp.* Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* often with birch *Betula spp* also is locally frequent. Where regularly mown, as for example at Hurn Airport, the dry heath has high proportions of bristle bent *Agrostis curtisii* or, more locally, wavy hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa*. Humid and wet heathland, mostly on the lower-lying areas, have varying proportions of ling, cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix*, purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* and the mosses *Sphagnum compactum* and *S. tenellum*. Heath spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza maculata* is locally frequent.

Bog communities, whilst present on a relatively small proportion of Hurn Common, are locally well developed. They support several species of *Sphagnum* moss and typical higher plants include Bog Asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum*, White Beak-sedge *Rhynchospora alba* and common cottongrass *Eriophorum angustifolium*. Hare's-tail cottongrass *Eriophorum vaginatum* a plant virtually confined in Dorset to the extreme east of the county is present and the rare Brown Beak-sedge *Rhynchospora fusca* also occurs. In wet acidic sallow and birch woodland there are vigorous stands of the very local royal fern *Osmunda regalis* and the rare elongated sedge *Carex elongata* has been recorded recently.

An important feature of the site is its areas of acid grassland which have developed from heathland. Dominated by bents *Agrostis spp* and rich in mosses (eg *Brachythecium albicans* and *Calliergon cuspidatum*) and commoner herbs such as yarrow *Achillea millefolium*, cat's-ear *Hypochaeris radicata* and bird's-foot *Ornithopus perpusillus*, they support several uncommon plants. These include yellow bartsia *Parentucellia viscosa*,

mossy stonecrop *Crassula tillaea* and maiden pink *Dianthus deltoides*, as well as the decreasing green-winged orchid *Orchis morio*.

The fauna of this large and varied site is similarly diverse. Among the invertebrates of the dry heathland, several species are uncommon or rare. The heath grasshopper *Chorthippus vagans*, a rare insect, is locally frequent here, and bracken heath is favoured by the woodland grasshopper *Omocestus rufipes* which is another local but more widespread insect. Damper heath supports the local bog bush-cricket *Metrioptera brachyptera* and the very local long-winged conehead *Conocephalus discolor* has also been recorded. The rare silver hook moth *Eustrotia uncula* occurs in the wettest heath. Dragonflies are well represented and include the scarce blue-tailed damselfly *Ischnura pumilio* and the very local small red damselfly *Ceragrion tenellum*. Other scarce insects of the woodland are wood cricket *Nemobius sylvestris* and festoon moth *Apoda avellana*.

This is an important site for the rare reptiles, the sand lizard *Lacerta agilis* and smooth snake *Coronella austriaca* which are well distributed on the drier heath. Several notable heathland birds nest at Hurn Common. These include the rare Dartford warbler *Sylvia undata*, hobby *Falco subbuteo* and the decreasing nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*. The woodlark *Lullula arborea* which is another local and declining species, is a particular feature of this area.