

Site name: Holnest

County: Dorset

District: North Dorset

Status: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, substituted by Schedule 9 to the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

Local Planning Authority: Dorset County Council, North Dorset District Council

National Grid reference: ST667106

Area: 54.83 (ha)

Ordnance Survey sheet: 1:50,000: 194

1:10,000: ST 60 NE, ST 61 SE.

Date notified: 3 February 2004

Reason for notification:

The SSSI is a nationally important site because it supports a large population of great crested newts *Triturus cristatus* on the south-western edge of their range. The SSSI consists of two areas, which include breeding ponds and terrestrial habitat that is used by the newts for resting, foraging and hibernation.

General description:

The site is situated on Oxford Clay. The clay soils are slowly permeable and seasonally waterlogged. Natural and artificial ponds are a feature of the landscape.

Holnest is located seven kilometres to the south of Sherborne. The particular combination and distribution of aquatic and terrestrial habitats provides ideal breeding, foraging and hibernation conditions for the great crested newt. Numbers of newts recorded on the site are exceptionally high for Dorset: over 200 individuals were recorded in spring 2003 at one pond. The newts depend on water for breeding and particularly favour moderately, deep well vegetated, ponds without fish. The number and variety of ponds on the site, which are largely rain-fed and hence of high water quality, provide extremely good conditions for newts.

Great crested newts lay their eggs on underwater vegetation. The ponds support marginal plants such as branched bur-reed *Sparganium erectum*, water-plantain *Alisma plantago-aquatica*, greater reedmace *Typha latifolia* and reed sweet-grass *Glyceria maxima* with broad-leaved pondweed *Potamogeton natans* the most frequent floating vegetation.

During the first two or three years of life before breeding starts, and outside the spring breeding season, great crested newts are dependent on terrestrial habitats to provide foraging areas and places to hibernate. These terrestrial habitats comprise predominantly woodlands and grasslands.

The woodlands comprise a canopy of ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* with some downy birch *Betula pubescens*, and with an understorey of hazel *Corylus avellana*, blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* and grey willow *Salix cinerea*.

The ground flora is dominated by bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* and includes moschatel *Adoxa moschatellina*, sanicle *Sanicula europea* and wood speedwell *Veronica montana*.

Much of the grassland is of a varied structure and provides good foraging conditions for great crested newts. Most has been improved in the past but it is not now farmed intensively. Some of the original herbs, such as pepper-saxifrage *Silaum silaus*, saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria* and corky-fruited water-dropwort *Oenanthe pimpinelloides*, persist around field margins that are dominated by tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia caespitosa* and Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*. Grassland of nature conservation interest has been re-established at Ryewater and other herbs and grasses present here include sweet vernal grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, betony *Stachys officinalis*, grass vetchling *Lathyrus nissolia* and dyer's greenweed *Genista tinctoria*.

In addition to the reasons for notification the site also supports the freshwater mud snail *Lymnaea glabra*, a scarce species vulnerable to habitat damage. Three nationally scarce moths have also been recorded: the mocha *Cyclophora annulata*, the marbled green *Cryphia muralis* and the tortrix moth *Epiblema tetragonana*.