

Site Name: Hurdlow Meadows **County:** Derbyshire

District: Derbyshire Dales

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 & Rights of Way Act 2000.

Local Planning Authority: Peak District National Park Authority, Derbyshire County Council, Derbyshire Dales District Council

National Grid reference: SK 125666 **Area:** 11.31 ha

Ordnance Survey Sheet: 119 **1:10,000:** SK 16 NW

Notification Date: 3 February 2005

Reasons for Notification:

Hurdlow Meadows is nationally important for species-rich unimproved neutral grassland. The community comprises a dry neutral grassland type characterised by crested dog's tail *Cynosurus cristatus* and common knapweed *Centaurea nigra*.

General description:

Hurdlow Meadows SSSI supports the largest area of species rich unimproved hay meadow on the Carboniferous limestone plateau within the Peak District National Park. Within Derbyshire and the Peak District, as throughout the UK, there have been significant losses of unimproved hay meadows as a result of agricultural improvement. Hurdlow Meadows exists today because of its long history of low intensity meadow management.

The site consists of a six adjoining fields, managed as one grazing unit. The fields lie on a slight southwest-facing slope. Neutral grassland extends over the six fields, though the influence of the limestone bedrock is strong in the southernmost field and along the bank which runs along the eastern edge of the site. Locally, on the thinnest soils, transitions to more typical dales limestone grassland are evident with sheep's-fescue *Festuca ovina*, quaking-grass *Briza media*, hoary plantain *Plantago media* and wild thyme *Thymus polytrichus*.

The most extensive areas of neutral grassland are characterised by grasses such as crested dog's-tail, sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and common bent grass *Agrostis capillaris*. The herbs include common knapweed, meadow buttercup *Ranunculus acris*, yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, red clover *Trifolium pratense*, oxeye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare* and common bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*.

Transitions to more calcareous neutral grassland occur, with this grassland type extensive in the southernmost field. The herb component here includes eyebright *Euphrasia* spp., lady's bedstraw *Galium verum* and fairy flax *Linum catharticum*, with frequent spring-sedge *Carex caryophylla* and glaucous sedge *Carex flacca*.

Great burnet *Sanguisorba officinalis* is frequent across much of the site. This species is generally characteristic of damper neutral grassland, but does well in this

community in late cut meadows in the Peak District and contributes to the local distinctiveness of the site.