

Site Name: The Bury Farm **County:** Herefordshire

District: Herefordshire

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: County of Herefordshire District Council

National Grid reference: SO497520 **Area:** 76.58 ha

Ordnance Survey Sheet: **1:50,000:** 149
1:10,000: SO45SE, SO55SW

Notification Date: 31 August 2006

Reasons for notification:

The Bury Farm SSSI is nationally important for its complex of species-rich, unimproved neutral and calcareous grasslands, and an assemblage of saproxylic (dead wood) invertebrates chiefly associated with veteran orchard trees.

General description:

The Bury Farm SSSI lies on the lower western flank of the Dinmore Hill, 5 km south of Leominster, Herefordshire. The bedrock is a complex mix of the St. Maughans Sandstone Formation and the Devonian age Lower Old Red Sandstone Raglan Mudstones. The latter is a formation of mudstones, calcareous sandstone and conglomerates, overlain in the valley of the Cherry Brook with glacial drift. A thin band of Devonian Bishop's Frome Limestone intersects this bedrock close to the 100m contour across the site, and in these areas causes the transition from neutral to calcareous grassland.

The grasslands are characterised by crested dog's tail *Cynosurus cristatus* common knapweed *Centaurea nigra* sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina*, and meadow oat-grass *Helictotrichon pratense*.

The crested dog's-tail-common knapweed neutral grassland occurs as pasture and hay meadow, with two plant communities. The meadow vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis* sub-community is the most extensive, occurring across the western third of the site on soils derived from glacial head deposits. The vegetation comprises a species-rich mixture of typical grasses such as sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*, red fescue *Festuca rubra* and common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, with frequent herbs such as cat's ear *Hypochaeris radicata*, bulbous buttercup *Ranunculus bulbosus*, ox-eye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, meadow vetchling and common bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*. Adder's tongue *Ophioglossum vulgatum* and common spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* are frequent in some of the fields, and one field has a very large stand of greater butterfly-orchid *Platanthera chlorantha*. The central part of the site shows the influence of more lime-rich soils, giving rise to the lady's bedstraw *Galium verum* sub-

community. Here, additional grasses include quaking-grass *Briza media*, sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina*, smaller cat's-tail *Phleum bertolonii*, and soft brome *Bromus hordeaceus*. A similar range and abundance of characteristic herbs occur, of which some fifty five species are recorded to date. Some fields or parts of fields show the effects of limited nutrient enrichment, where the sward is now a perennial rye-grass - crested dog's-tail *Lolium perenne* - *Cynosurus cristatus* pasture with a reduced herb cover.

On the slopes to the north of the farmhouse, the shallow limestone bedrock and a long grazing history has created a sheep's fescue- meadow oat-grass limestone grassland. This community is now one of the rarest habitats in the West Midlands region. A high diversity of grasses includes the limestone specialists crested hair-grass *Koeleria macrantha*, tor-grass *Brachypodium pinnatum* and upright brome *Bromus erecta*. Typical herbs of this community overlap with those of the neutral swards, with additional, distinctive species such as dwarf thistle *Cirsium acaule*, wild thyme *Thymus polytrichus*, fairy flax *Linum catharticum*, restharrow *Ononis repens*, wild carrot *Daucus carota*, mouse-ear hawkweed *Pilosella officinarum* and eyebrights *Euphrasia* spp. The most northerly field, close to the farm track, has a large population of autumn lady's-tresses *Spiranthes spiralis*, a Near Threatened species.

The Bury Farm SSSI has an overall habitat diversity that greatly complements the special interest of the grasslands. There are ancient and species-rich hedgerows, veteran and mature field boundary trees, small areas of scrub, two ponds and tree-lined streams, old quarried ground, localised springs and areas of bracken.

Historic mapping shows that orchards have been present on this farm since at least the mid-19th century, and around half of the trees in each of the two orchards are now hollow and contain wood-mould. The nationally scarce (but locally common) wood-mould resource, the continuity of orchard tree cover, and the juxtaposition of other quality habitats, have allowed a significant deadwood invertebrate community to establish, which is indicative of a high quality, ancient wood-pasture system. In addition to the three Red Data Book species, it includes 22 nationally scarce species and other commoner deadwood beetles. These include ancient woodland indicators such as the staphylinid beetle *Hypnogyra angularis*, the weevil *Stereocorynes truncorum*, and the histereid beetle *Plegaderus dissectus*. The orchard trees have a good quantity of mistletoe, which in turn supports a specialised community of species including the mistletoe beetle *Ixapion variegatum*, only recently identified in Britain, and the jumping plant louse *Psylla visci*. The apple trees also support the Nationally Scarce red-belted clearwing moth *Synanthedon myopaeformis*, a species with only three other 10 km² records in the County. The surrounding grasslands also support invertebrates of note, with the Nationally Scarce weevil *Sitona waterhousei*, which feeds on common birdsfoot trefoil, being an example. Some of the grasslands also have many anthills of the yellow meadow ant *Lasius flavus*.

Other information:

The site also supports a wide range of features of historic and archaeological interest.