

EC Directive 92/43 on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora

Citation for Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

Name:	Dorset Heaths
Unitary Authority/County:	Bournemouth, Dorset, Hampshire, Poole
SAC status:	Designated on 1 April 2005
Grid reference:	SY887835
SAC EU code:	UK0019857
Area (ha):	5730.73
Component SSSI:	Arne SSSI, Black Hill Heath SSSI, Blue Pool and Norden Heaths SSSI, Bourne Valley SSSI, Canford Heath SSSI, Christchurch Harbour SSSI, Corfe and Barrow Hills SSSI, Corfe Common SSSI, Corfe Mullen Pastures SSSI, Cranborne Common SSSI, Ebblake Bog SSSI, Ferndown Common SSSI, Ham Common SSSI, Holt and West Moors Heath SSSI, Holton and Sandford Heaths SSSI, Horton Common SSSI, Hurn Common SSSI, Lions Hill SSSI, Morden Bog and Hyde Heath SSSI, Oakers Bog SSSI, Parley Common SSSI, Poole Harbour SSSI, Povington and Grange Heaths SSSI, Rempstone Heaths SSSI, Slop Bog and Uddens Heath SSSI, St Leonards and St Ives Heaths SSSI, Stoborough and Creech Heaths SSSI, Stokeford Heaths SSSI, Town Common SSSI, Turbary and Kinson Commons SSSI, Turners Puddle Heath SSSI, Upton Heath SSSI, Verwood Heaths SSSI, Wareham Meadows SSSI, Warmwell Heath SSSI, Winfrith Heath SSSI, Worgret Heath SSSI

Site description:

This site, with the Dorset Heaths (Purbeck and Wareham) and Studland Dunes SAC, covers an extensive complex of heaths that form one of the best developed and most significant tracts of heathland in the lowlands of the UK. There are fine transitions between dry heath, wet heath and acid mire vegetation types, as well as a high diversity of associated habitats such as acid grassland, sand dune, acid oak woods, bog woodland, base-rich mires, fen-meadow, reedswamp and small water bodies.

The dry heath occurs on very infertile soils and is dominated by heather *Calluna vulgaris* growing in association with bell heather *Erica cinerea*, gorse *Ulex europaeus* and usually one of the dwarf gorse species – dwarf gorse *U. minor* and western gorse *U. gallii*. These heaths are not diverse botanically but occasionally some nationally scarce plants occur, such as mossy stonecrop *Crassula tillaea*, which has a stronghold on the Dorset heathlands. In places, where heather *Calluna vulgaris* occurs in mature stands, lichens of the genus *Cladonia* are very abundant. Uncommon features are the localised presence of bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* and the co-existence in some areas of the two dwarf gorse species. The dry heath, in conjunction with the wider heathland mosaic, supports important assemblages of animal species that include grasshoppers (Orthoptera), bees and wasps (Hymenoptera), spiders (Arachnida), and all six species of native British reptiles. Some species have a major part of their UK population on these heaths, including silver-studded blue butterfly *Plebejus argus*, heath grasshopper *Chorthippus vagans*, the mason wasp *Pseudepipona herrichii*, ladybird spider *Eresus cinnaberinus*, sand lizard *Lacerta agilis* and smooth snake *Coronella austriaca*.

Typically the wet heaths occupy areas of impeded drainage on the lower sides of valleys and on areas of less steeply sloping ground over more impermeable soils. They are characterised by the dominance of cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix*, heather and purple moor-grass *Molinia*

caerulea, often in association with the bog-moss *Sphagnum compactum*. In many situations the wet heaths grade into examples of other wetland vegetation types. These are usually base-poor, acid mire communities and include a widespread presence of the more floristically rich *Rhynchosporion* associated with depressions on peat in bog pool and flush situations. White beak-sedge *Rhynchospora alba*, round- and oblong-leaved sundews *Drosera rotundifolia* and *D. intermedia*, and the bog-mosses *Sphagnum auriculatum* and *S. pulchrum* are among the typical species. The wet heaths and acid mires support a diverse group of nationally rare and scarce species. Among the plants these include Dorset heath *Erica ciliaris* (which readily hybridises with *E. tetralix*) and bog orchid *Hammarbya paludosa*, and national population strongholds for brown beak-sedge *Rhynchospora fusca*, marsh gentian *Gentiana pneumonanthe* and marsh clubmoss *Lycopodiella inundata*.

To the north of the Purbeck chalk ridge and in places elsewhere, spring-fed water flushes the heathland wetlands. This base enrichment gives rise to mires characterised by the presence of black bog-rush *Schoenus nigricans* and species rich fen-meadows that conform to the purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* – meadow thistle *Cirsium dissectum* community. Near Poole Harbour a further type of wetland, saw sedge *Cladium mariscus* fen, occurs very locally.

The heathland wetlands together with numerous small water bodies form a stronghold for invertebrates, particularly dragonflies and damselflies (Odonata) such as small red damselfly *Ceriagrion tenellum* and southern damselfly *Coenagrion mercuriale*, some grasshoppers notably large marsh grasshopper *Stethophyma grossum*, butterflies and moths (Lepidoptera), beetles (Coleoptera) and spiders. Some of the ponds, particularly towards the edges of the heathland area where there is base enrichment of the groundwater, support populations of great crested newt *Triturus cristatus*.

Qualifying habitats: The site is designated under **article 4(4)** of the Directive (92/43/EEC) as it hosts the following habitats listed in Annex I:

- Alkaline fens. (Calcium-rich springwater-fed fens)
- Calcareous fens with *Cladium mariscus* and species of the *Caricion davallianae*. (Calcium-rich fen dominated by great fen sedge (saw sedge))*
- Depressions on peat substrates of the *Rhynchosporion*
- European dry heaths
- *Molinia* meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (*Molinion caeruleae*). (Purple moor-grass meadows)
- Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix*. (Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath)
- Old acidophilous oak woods with *Quercus robur* on sandy plains. (Dry oak-dominated woodland)

Qualifying species: The site is designated under **article 4(4)** of the Directive (92/43/EEC) as it hosts the following species listed in Annex II:

- Great crested newt *Triturus cristatus*
- Southern damselfly *Coenagrion mercuriale*

Annex I priority habitats are denoted by an asterisk (*).

This citation relates to a site entered in the Register of European Sites for Great Britain.

Register reference number: UK0019857

Date of registration: 14 June 2005

Signed: *Trew Salmon*

On behalf of the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs