

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

Citation for Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

Name: St Albans Head to Durlston Head
Unitary Authority/County: Dorset
SAC status: Designated on 1 April 2005
Grid reference: SZ006770
SAC EU code: UK0019863
Area (ha): 287.22
Component SSSI: South Dorset Coast SSSI, Townsend SSSI

Site description:

This site, with Isle of Portland to Studland Cliffs SAC, forms a single unit of cliffed coastline some 40 km in length that combines internationally important geological interest with a rich range of wildlife habitats. At this site the cliffs are formed of hard Jurassic limestones. These support species-rich calcareous grasslands with species that are scarce in the UK, such as wild cabbage *Brassica oleracea* var. *oleracea*, Nottingham catchfly *Silene nutans* and long-standing populations of early gentian *Gentianella anglica* numbering several thousands of plants. The maritime vegetation of the cliff faces and former quarried ledges includes species such as golden-samphire *Inula crithmoides*, rock samphire *Crithmum maritimum* and sea spleenwort *Asplenium marinum*.

The extensive species-rich examples of tor-grass *Brachypodium pinnatum* calcareous grassland are also important for the largest UK population of early spider-orchid *Ophrys sphegodes*. This species has declined very dramatically in the UK since the 1950s, in both population size and range.

Townsend supports calcareous grassland and scrub. This area and much of the cliff coast was formerly quarried for Purbeck stone and the underground galleries and associated quarry entrances provide important winter roosting sites for bats, including the rare greater horseshoe bat *Rhinolophus ferrum-equinum*.

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:

- Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*) (important orchid sites). (Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone, including important orchid sites)*
- Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts

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:

- Early gentian *Gentianella anglica*
- Greater horseshoe bat *Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*

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: UK0019863
Date of registration: 14 June 2005
Signed: *Trevor Salmon*
On behalf of the Secretary of State for Environment,
Food and Rural Affairs