

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

Citation for Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

Name:	Sidmouth to West Bay
Unitary Authority/County:	Devon, Dorset
SAC status:	Designated on 1 April 2005
Grid reference:	SY326912
SAC EU code:	UK0019864
Area (ha):	897.30
Component SSSI:	Axmouth to Lyme Regis SSSI, Sidmouth to Beer Coast SSSI, West Dorset Coast SSSI

Site description:

This site is an example of a highly unstable soft cliff coastline subject to mudslides and landslips. The principal rock types are soft mudstones, clays and silty limestones, with a small chalk outlier in the west. The central part comprises the extensive Axmouth to Lyme Regis landslip, where chalk overlies unstable rocks, resulting in slips ranging from frequent minor events to occasional large-scale movements when entire blocks of the chalk scarp move seawards. The eastern part has no chalk capping and is subject to frequent mudslides in the waterlogged soft limestones and clays. Vegetation is very varied and includes pioneer communities on recent slips, calcareous grassland and scrub on detached chalk blocks and extensive self-sown woodland dominated by ash *Fraxinus excelsior* or sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*.

The active landslipping between Axmouth and Lyme Regis has created, and continues to shape, a mosaic of woodland, mixed scrub, grassland and pioneer communities. This mosaic of habitats makes the site rich in invertebrates, especially bees and wasps, such as *Ectemnius ruficornis*, *Andrena simillima* and *Nomada fulvicornis*. The woodland has a hazel *Corylus avellana* understorey and a ground-flora dominated by ivy *Hedera helix* (with numerous ivy broomrape *Orobanche hederæ*) and hart's-tongue *Phyllitis scolopendrium*, with abundant dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and tutsan *Hypericum androsaemum*. The Red Data Book lichen *Parmelia quercina* occurs on ash *Fraxinus excelsior*.

The maritime character of the vegetation is most marked at the cliff edge where thrift *Armeria maritima* is important in the sparse turf. The strongest British population of the nationally rare stinking goosefoot *Chenopodium vulvaria* occurs on exposed soil in this location. Other plants of local distribution, occurring mainly in the more open and cliff grassland communities, include sea kale *Crambe maritima*, Portland spurge *Euphorbia portlandica*, spring felwort *Gentianella anglica*, mountain St John's wort *Hypericum montanum*, rock sea lavender *Limonium binervosum*, sea radish *Raphanus maritimus* and Nottingham catchfly *Silene nutans*. There is an abrupt transition at the cliff base to intertidal rock or shingle; this is only sparsely vegetated by seaweeds but some 60 species of these have been recorded.

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:

- Annual vegetation of drift lines
- *Tilio-Acerion* forests of slopes, screes and ravines. (Mixed woodland on base-rich soils associated with rocky slopes)*
- Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts

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: UK0019864

Date of registration: 14 June 2005

Signed: *Trew Salmon*

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