

COUNTY: SHROPSHIRE

SITE NAME: HOPE VALLEY MEADOWS

DISTRICT: South Shropshire

SITE REF: 15WW2

Status: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended.

Local Planning Authority: SHROPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL, South Shropshire District Council

National Grid Reference: SJ 340009, SJ 342009

Area: 2.11 (ha.) 5.2 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 126

1:10,000: SJ 30 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): –

Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1993

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

New site. With the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Hope Valley Meadows consists of two traditionally managed herb-rich meadows lying on the eastern side of Hope Valley in south west Shropshire. The meadows are of special interest for a type of herb-rich neutral grassland, characterised by crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* and common knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, which is now very scarce in Shropshire and which is nationally restricted. Hope Valley Meadows is the best example, being the most typical and species diverse, of the few remaining neutral grasslands in this part of Shropshire.

The meadows contain a wide variety of grasses, the most abundant being crested dog's-tail, sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, quaking-grass *Briza media*, Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus* and red fescue *Festuca rubra*. A varied herbaceous flora includes species characteristic of traditionally managed pastures and hay meadows, such as common knapweed, autumn hawkbit *Leontodon autumnalis*, devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, betony *Stachys officinalis* with, more locally, meadow vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis* and cowslip *Primula veris*. Other elements of the flora are variable in abundance reflecting differences in management, drainage and nutrient status between the two meadows.

The eastern-most meadow, situated on the freely draining slopes of the valley, is maintained as pasture grazed by sheep. A particular feature of this meadow is the presence of an exceptionally varied and interesting flora. In addition to species characteristic of neutral grasslands, the sward includes heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile*, heath speedwell *Veronica officinalis* and tormentil *Potentilla erecta* which are typical of acid soils, as well as fairy flax *Linum catharticum* and burnet-saxifrage *Pimpinella saxifraga* which are associated with calcareous substrates. The profusion of a wide variety of herbs in this meadow is indicative of soils which are poor in nutrients but relatively calcareous in nature.

The lower meadow is mown annually for hay and appears to be more base-rich than the grazed meadow further up the slope. Oxeye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare* and yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor* are especially prominent in this meadow. The diversity of the flora is enhanced by the presence of wetter areas, associated with ditches and occurring on low lying land towards the valley bottom. Here the sward is characterised by marsh foxtail *Alopecurus geniculatus*, jointed rush *Juncus articulatus* and compact rush *J. conglomeratus* with meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, lesser spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*, sneezewort *Achillea ptarmica* and frequent sedges *Carex* spp.

Both meadows support a number of species which are either uncommon or rare in Shropshire, such as moonwort *Botrychium lunaria*, adder's-tongue *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, common spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, dyer's greenweed *Genista tinctoria* and marsh hawk's-beard *Crepis paludosa*.