

COUNTY: SHROPSHIRE

SITE NAME: PRINCE'S ROUGH

DISTRICT: SOUTH SHROPSHIRE

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: SO 470866

Area: 1.46 (ha.) 3.61 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheets 1:50,000: 137

1:10,000: SO 48 NE

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 19 January 1999

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

A new site. With the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Description:

Prince's Rough is a traditionally managed herb-rich hay meadow situated on the dip slope of Wenlock Edge close to the hamlet of Westhope in South Shropshire. The meadow lies on gently sloping ground, with a south-easterly aspect, and overlies Wenlock Limestones and the grey silty mudstones of the Wenlock Shales which give rise to predominantly neutral soils with both calcareous and acidic influences.

The meadow is 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 and declining. There has been considerable loss of unimproved grassland in South Shropshire and especially on Wenlock Edge where herb-rich grasslands have almost all been destroyed. Prince's Rough is one of the most species diverse of the few remaining neutral grasslands in this part of Shropshire. The meadow is also notable for the occurrence of three different sub-communities for this type of neutral grassland within: a relatively small area, a feature which is indicative of the local variations in geology and soil conditions.

The meadow contains a wide variety of grasses, the most abundant being crested dog's-tail, sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus*, quaking-grass *Briza media* and red fescue *Festuca rubra*. A varied herbaceous flora includes species which are characteristic of traditionally managed hay meadows such as common knapweed, betony *Stachys officinalis*, autumn hawkbit *Leontodon autumnalis*, cat's-ear *Hypochoeris radicata* with, more locally, meadow vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis*, cowslip *Primula veris* and yellow rattle *Rhinanthus minor*.

The flora of much of the meadow is typical of the meadow vetchling sub-community with frequent bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, meadow vetchling, and field scabious *Knautia arvensis*. Locally, the abundance of lady's bedstraw *Galium verum*, yarrow *Achillea millefolium*, yellow oat-grass *Trisetum flavescens* and glaucous sedge *Carex flacca*, however, is indicative of a change to the lady's bedstraw sub-community of this type of neutral grassland reflecting a stronger calcareous influence.

There are also parts of the meadow which have a more acidic appearance and conform to the heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens* sub-community reflecting further changes in the nutrient status of the soil. In these areas species such as heath-grass, devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, tormentil *Potentilla erecta* burnet-saxifrage *Pimpinella*

saxifraga and spring sedge *Carex caryophylla* form significant elements of the vegetation.

The presence of a wet area associated with a redundant ditch and a small seasonal pool at the southern end of the meadow add to the overall diversity of the flora. Here the sward is characterised by tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa*, meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, hard rush *Juncus inflexus*, compact rush *J. conglomeratus* and false fox-sedge *Carex otrubae*.

The meadow supports a number of species which are either uncommon or rare in Shropshire, such as dyer's greenweed *Genista tinctoria*, hoary plantain *Plantago media*, heath spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza maculata*, early-purple orchid *Orchis mascula* and pepper-saxifrage *Silaum silaus*.

Large mature hedgerows border part of the site with one lying within the meadow, formerly separating the meadow into two fields. These hedgerows are species-rich with a mixture of hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, hazel *Corylus avellana*, dog-rose *Rosa canina*, ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and pedunculate oak *Quercus petraea*.