

Dorset Notable plant species

When we send out the results of our SNCI surveys to owners, we always include a full list of the species which we recorded at the visit, with the 'Dorset Notable' (DN) species marked or highlighted. These are a suite of plants which are important for determining whether a site qualifies as an SNCI.



Common knapweed

So what signifies a Dorset Notable?

A Dorset Notable is not necessarily a rare plant, although some can be, but more an indicator of good unimproved or semi-improved habitat. By this we mean, for example, an area of grassland that hasn't had regular amounts of artificial fertilizers, or been re-seeded with rye-grass and/or white clover.

An SNCI generally needs a minimum of 5 Dorset Notables to qualify, but really good examples of unimproved chalk grassland for instance can have between 20 and 30 such as dwarf thistle, salad burnet and pyramidal orchid, whilst a good hay meadow may contain 10-15, such as common knapweed, lady's bedstraw and devil's-bit scabious.

Dry heathlands tend to have few notables with low plant diversity, but wet heath/mire can contain numerous notables such as sundews, bog asphodel and white-beak sedge. Acid grasslands also comprise relatively few notables but can contain scarce spring flowering annuals, and provide an important addition to Dorset's biodiversity.

Woodland SNCIs are usually on the Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI), which means they have been wooded continually since 1600, or they are Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) and so may still retain their ancient woodland flora. So the woodland notables tend to be ancient woodland indicator plants. They include wood anemone for instance, a plant that spreads via its roots, as much of its seed is not viable, and may only spread 2m in a hundred years!

Appropriate management of all of these habitats is needed to ensure that these important, and often vulnerable plants survive and even increase and spread.

Mark James
SNCI surveyor



Yellow archangel



Round-leaved sundew



Wood anemones



Devil's-bit scabious



Meadow thistle



Pyramidal orchids

CONTACTS

For further information on SNCIs:
Sharron Abbott 01305 264620

Dorset Wildlife Trust West Dorset Team Office:
01300 321329

For advice on Environmental Stewardship:

We suggest you initially contact our West Dorset Team on 01300 321329. They should be able to advise you as to the best course of action or person to contact within the re-structured Natural England team for further help.

Forestry Authority: 07979 540350

Lee Dawson

FWAGSW: 07966 032029

Clare Buckerfield

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SNCI Project
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The Green Linnet

The Newsletter for owners of Sites of Nature Conservation Interest



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Grassland Management in Wild Purbeck



Gorse encroachment on the Purbeck Ridge



The Purbeck Ridge with a good mosaic of short and longer turf produced by extensive cattle grazing

The Wild Purbeck Nature Improvement Area (NIA) is enabling us to focus on the management of grasslands in Purbeck.

This includes working with farmers to secure HLS agreements and providing on-going support through 1:1 visits and workshops to help meet the management requirements of existing agreements. Since April 2012 we have assisted 8 farmers with HLS applications that include species-rich grasslands. The agreements secure on-going financial support to maintain and restore 212 ha of existing species-rich grassland, and to restore or create an additional 20 ha, achieving a 10% increase across the combined agreement area. The focus for the next 18 months is to work with these and other farmers to maximise what the Stewardship agreements deliver.

We are also starting to look specifically at the Purbeck ridge, which has a number of SNCIs, as well as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), to ascertain how and where it has changed over the last 80 years. We are particularly looking at species diversity, gorse cover and management, which will inform future management recommendations to help ensure that the ridge provides a wide diversity of habitats and thus supports a wide range of species.

Habitat diversity is particularly important to help species adapt to the pressures they face from climate change. For example some insects are sensitive to small temperature changes in the grass sward and may need to move to a different aspect to find the grassland temperature they need to thrive. So management needs to ensure that there is a variation in sward height and structure across the different aspects of the Purbeck ridge so that it can support the movement of these species. Dense patches of gorse prevent the movement of ground crawling and low-flying insects who don't know they 'need to go round'.

In October we launched the Farm Habitat Grant Scheme 2013 which can offer small capital grants to help with the management of habitat in the NIA including grassland. Perhaps you need to install a water trough to enable grazing, or clear some scrub and are not able to access HLS capital grants; these and other projects would be eligible for funding.

If you have grassland in Purbeck and would like to find out more about how the NIA can help you then please contact FWAG SouthWest on 01305 228913.

Clare Buckerfield



Part of a nationwide network of Wildlife Trusts



Grass is not greener on the other side of the CAP

As you read this, Dorset Wildlife Trust will have just finished its response to Defra on the implementation of CAP Reform in England. There are many elements within it worthy of comment from a Wildlife Trust, but one topic remains firmly at the top of our list of concerns - Grassland.

Statistics show that the trend for grassland appears to be one of accelerating loss. The detail and analysis is due to be published shortly, but the underlying message is that should this continue there are potential impacts not just for individual high quality wildlife sites, such as our SNCIs, but on water quality, our ability to address EU regulatory obligations, and to manage the effects of climate change.

Under the new CAP programme the proposal is that overall the ratio of permanent grassland area to agricultural area in England must not fall by more than 5% compared to the baseline (set at 2012). If current trends of accelerating loss persist, England will be on course to breach this 5%, with farmers and landowners being asked to take remedial action.

We have known for some time that the ability to support farmers and landowners in managing their SINC grasslands is becoming increasingly difficult and we have argued, and continue to argue, for their financial support through New Environmental Land Management Schemes and the recognition they deserve through 'Greening'. Unfortunately all indications are that less money will be available in the next programme to support such environmental payments.

Our response to the consultation will indicate that far from being a CAP that is greener and supportive of the many farmers who actively manage high quality grassland sites as part of their agricultural business, it has been severely weakened to the point that we are now in danger of undermining not only our wildlife, but the role our wildlife habitats play in supporting food production, water quality and landscapes.

Debbie Watkins

South Dorset Ridgeway Project

The South Dorset Ridgeway Partnership, coordinated by the Dorset AONB team, is bringing together a diverse range of naturalists and conservation organisations, archaeologists and historians, landowners, artists, teachers and local people, with the aim of nurturing the distinctive landscape of the South Dorset Ridgeway.

Dorset Wildlife Trust is one of the key partners in this project, and, along with FWAG SouthWest and Kingston Maurward College, we aim to work with landowners and managers in the project area to maintain, enhance and link areas of important wildlife habitat along with the landscape and archaeological features in order to restore the 'Living Landscape' of the South Dorset Ridgeway.

SNCI owners hold some of the key wildlife sites in the area of the Ridgeway. We have already started to re-survey some SNCIs, and the results of these surveys will help us target advice and support to owners in managing the sites to benefit their wildlife interest. There will be a small grant fund available for certain capital works programmes for these sites, such as scrub and bracken reduction, or fencing and provision of water supply to enable grazing on neglected grasslands, or removal of invasive alien species including Rhododendron or Himalayan Balsam in woodlands.

SNCI owners will receive a coloured, laminated Management Statement for each site a few months after the survey, detailing the botanical interest of the site, and providing advice on the best management options to maintain or improve the quality of the site for wildlife. Our liaison staff will contact owners and tenants to offer free advisory visits to discuss possible sources of grant-aid for appropriate management of existing SNCIs and even further habitat creation or restoration to provide those vital linkages.

To find out more about the South Dorset Ridgeway Project and the many ways in which people can get involved go to:

<http://www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/our-work/south-dorset-ridgeway-partnership>

Sharron Abbott



The South Dorset Ridgeway

Grassland management and the Lulworth Skipper butterfly

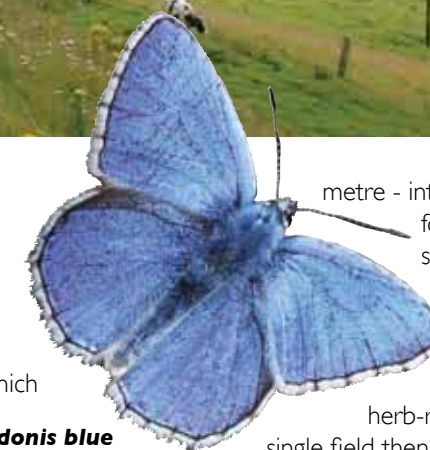


Lulworth skipper

If you happened to be on the coast path on a warm, still, sunny afternoon this July there is a good chance you will have been rewarded by the sight of large numbers of Lulworth Skippers nectaring on the colourful chalk grassland flowers. So-called because it was first discovered here in 1832, this tiny butterfly remains faithful to Dorset occurring largely along the coast between Weymouth and Swanage, the only county in the UK to be continually graced by its presence and attracting butterfly enthusiasts from far and wide. In fact Britain marks the northern edge of its range which extends across southern and central Europe, North Africa and the Middle East.

Sadly however, recent studies have revealed a downward trend in population size with 31 of the known 60 colonies in Dorset suffering declines between 1997 and 2010, 10 of these by over 90%. It is unclear why this butterfly is in trouble but the answer might lie in its rather exacting requirements for Tor-grass of between 15 and 50cm high on south-facing slopes for egg-laying. Swards below 10cm are shunned. Too much grazing and the sward will be too short, too little and scrub will spread forming a barrier to flight and reducing the suitable area for the colony.

Unfortunately Tor-grass is a vigorous species that quickly out-competes our smaller chalk grassland plants turning one of our richest habitats – up to 40 species of plant in a square



Adonis blue

metre - into a dense species-poor sward, unsuitable for the many other insects that require a short turf and the plants that thrive in it - one example being the striking Adonis Blue whose larvae feed on Horseshoe Vetch. Ideally then, there needs to be a balance, with areas of both short herb-rich turf and long Tor-grass, if not within a single field then within the larger landscape.

This is not an easy task but continuous extensive light grazing with cattle, sheep or ponies will produce valuable mosaics; cattle are ideal as they produce a varied sward structure and break up the dense mats of Tor-grass. The lie of the land also helps as easily accessible areas will be preferentially grazed leaving the steep slopes to the Tor-grass but also, alas, the scrub of which the butterfly wants no more than a scattering on less than 10-20% of the site!

Amanda Marler