

COUNTY: DEVON

SITE NAME: POPEHOUSE MOOR

DISTRICT: TORRIDGE

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

Local Planning Authority: DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL, Torridge District Council

National Grid Reference: SS 647097      Area: 3.19 (ha.) 7.89 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 191      1:10,000: SS 60 NW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): –      Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1989      Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

A new site.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

This site is remarkable in showing within a small area a wide range of the different plant communities typical of the Carboniferous slates and shales of North Devon. Some of these communities are very restricted in their distribution nationally and several rare or local plant species are present.

Most of the site lies on seasonally-waterlogged clays, and here the vegetation is dominated by rushes *Juncus effusus* and *J. acutiflorus* interspersed with Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* and Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus*. Common Marsh-bedstraw *Galium palustre* and Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus uliginosus* are frequent; other plants present include Sneezewort *Achillea ptarmica* and the nationally scarce Wavy St John's-wort *Hypericum undulatum*. A few stands of the Greater Tussock-sedge *Carex paniculata* occur among the rushes.

Interspersed in the rush pasture are patches that are relatively freely-draining and others that are permanently waterlogged. The latter support mire-type vegetation, characterised by bog mosses *Sphagnum recurvum* and *S. auriculatum* and frequent Star Sedge *Carex echinata*, Marsh Violet *Viola palustris* and Bog Pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*. Common Cottongrass *Eriophorum angustifolium*, Marsh Lousewort *Pedicularis palustris* and Bog bean *Menyanthes trifoliata* occur in these mires with the local Pale Butterwort *Pinguicula lusitanica*, sometimes in association with small stands of Bottle Sedge *Carex rostrata*.

The better drained parts of the site support two further communities. Where the underlying soil is loamy, well-grazed grassy swards dominated by bents *Agrostis* spp. have developed, with frequent Betony *Stachys officinalis*, Cat's-ear *Hypochoeris radicata*, Yarrow *Achillea millefolium* and the moss *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus*. On the clays, however, a type of fen-meadow has developed, of a type largely restricted to North Devon, with an abundance of small sedges (mainly *Carex panicea*, *C. hostiana* and *C. pulcaris*) and of Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis*. Typical associated plants include Meadow Thistle *Cirsium dissectum*, Saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria*, Lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica* and Heath Spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza maculata*. A heathy component is evident also, with occasional plants of Heather *Calluna vulgaris*, Cross-leaved Heath *Erica tetralix* and the local Petty Whin *Genista anglica*. Ivy-leaved Bell flower *Wahlenbergia hederacea*, a plant seldom found away from Dartmoor and Exmoor in Devon, is present in some quantity.

A small stream runs along the northern boundary of the site, overhung by Grey Willow *Salix cinerea* and Alder *Alnus glutinosa*, with adjacent patches of willow carr and tall fen vegetation. The latter contain stands of Branched Bur-reed *Sparganium erectum* and Meadow sweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, interspersed with Yellow Iris *Iris pseudacorus*, Hemp-agrimony *Eupatorium cannabinum* and Common Valerian *Valeriana officinalis*. Also within the site is a small wood dominated by birch *Betula* spp. and with a Hazel *Corylus avellana* understorey, while patches of gorse *Ulex europaeus* and *U. gallii* are scattered throughout the grassland.

The fauna of the site is as yet little known, although the scarce Marsh Fritillary butterfly *Eurodryas aurinia* is known to breed, as is the Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*.