

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

Citation for Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

Name: Prescombe Down
Unitary Authority/County: Wiltshire
SAC status: Designated on 1 April 2005
Grid reference: ST986254
SAC EU code: UK0012553
Area (ha): 76.14
Component SSSI: Prescombe Down SSSI

Site description:

Prescombe Down is a botanically rich downland site with a flora characteristic of the south and south-west chalk grassland. In addition the downland supports a rich butterfly community, including some scarce species such as the marsh fritillary *Euphydryas aurinia*. The site consists of a deep, forking, coombe system eroded into an escarpment of the Upper Chalk. The steep sides of the dry valleys exhibit a variety of aspect which is reflected in the species composition of the turf. South and south-west facing slopes are dominated by sheep's-fescue *Festuca ovina* and dwarf sedge *Carex humilis*. In contrast, on north and north-east facing slopes sheep's-fescue is co-dominant with glaucous sedge *Carex flacca*. Red fescue *Festuca rubra* is generally abundant and many other grasses, such as downy oat-grass *Helictotrichon pubescens*, quaking grass *Briza media* and crested hairgrass *Koeleria macrantha* are widespread. Heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens* and spreading meadow-grass *Poa subcaerulea* also occur. Chalk herbs are well represented in the sward. Species such as harebell *Campanula rotundifolia*, fairy flax *Linum catharticum* and salad burnet *Sanguisorba minor* are common throughout, whereas others, including horseshoe vetch *Hippocrepis comosa*, common rock-rose *Helianthemum nummularium*, squinancywort *Asperula cynanchica* and early gentian *Gentianella anglica* are more restricted to the warm south-facing slopes and sheltered coombes.

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:

- Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*) (dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone).

Qualifying species: The site is designated under **article 4(4)** of the Directive (92/43/EEC) as it hosts the following species listed in Annex II:

- Early gentian *Gentianella anglica*
- Marsh fritillary butterfly *Euphydryas* (*Eurodryas*, *Hypodryas*) *aurinia*

This citation relates to a site entered in the Register of European Sites for Great Britain.

Register reference number: UK0012553

Date of registration: 14 June 2005

Signed: *Trevor Salmon*

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