

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

## Citation for Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

**Name:** Isle of Wight Downs  
**Unitary Authority/County:** Isle of Wight  
**SAC status:** Designated on 1 April 2005  
**Grid reference:** SZ373857  
**SAC EU code:** UK0016254  
**Area (ha):** 461.80  
**Component SSSI:** Compton Down SSSI, Headon Warren and West High Down SSSI, Mottistone Down SSSI, Ventnor Downs SSSI

### Site description:

This complex contains semi-natural dry grassland on chalk, with extensive areas of sheep's-fescue – meadow oat-grass (*Festuca ovina* – *Helictotrichon pratense*) grassland in both inland and coastal situations. In places this grades into sheep'-fescue – carline thistle *Carlina vulgaris* grassland, particularly on south-facing slopes on the coast, which contains important examples of lichen-rich maritime chalk grassland. Smaller areas of upright brome *Bromopsis erecta* grassland occur on the eastern parts of the chalk outcrop. Grassland is locally replaced by heather – dwarf gorse (*Calluna vulgaris* – *Ulex minor*) dry heaths where superficial deposits overlie the chalk. There are also some stands of the rare chalk heath, with features intermediate between chalk grassland and *Calluna* – *Ulex* heath. The cliff tops provide a range of sheltered and exposed conditions, and the most exposed support assemblages of nationally rare lichens including *Fulgensia fulgens*. At the western end of the site, the instability and maritime influence has altered the chalk grassland vegetation to include maritime species such as yellow horned-poppy *Glaucium flavum*, rock samphire *Crithmum maritimum* and wild cabbage *Brassica oleracea* var. *oleracea*, together with calcareous grassland species such as wild carrot *Daucus carota*, carline thistle and lesser hawkbit *Leontodon saxatilis*. This site represents an uncommon transition from chalk grassland species to sea cliff vegetation, including very large populations of early gentian *Gentianella anglica*.

**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:

- European dry heaths
- Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*). (Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone)
- Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts

**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*

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

Register reference number: UK0016254

Date of registration: 14 June 2005

Signed: *Trevor Salmon*

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