

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

Citation for Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

Name:	Peak District Dales
Unitary Authority/County:	Derbyshire, Staffordshire
SAC status:	Designated on 1 April 2005
Grid reference:	SK142550
SAC EU code:	UK0019859
Area (ha):	2326.33
Component SSSI:	Ballidon Dale SSSI, Coombs Dale SSI, Cressbrook Dale SSSI, Dove Valley and Biggin Dale SSSI, Hamps and Manifold Valleys SSSI, Lathkill Dale SSSI, Long Dale and Gratton Dale SSSI, Long Dale, Hartington SSSI, Matlock Woods SSSI, Monks Dale SSSI, The Wye Valley SSSI, Topley Pike and Deep Dale SSSI, Via Gellia Woodlands SSSI

Site description:

The Carboniferous Limestone massif of the Peak District is one of the most important in Britain, lying in latitude and altitude between the Mendips and the Craven area of Yorkshire. The limestone is cut by valleys, the 'dales', which contain a wide range of wildlife habitats, particularly woodland, scrub and grassland. This mosaic of habitats and the transitions between them are of exceptional interest for a wide range of characteristic, rare and uncommon flora and fauna.

Peak District Dales includes one of the largest surviving areas in England of sheep's-fescue – meadow oat-grass (*Festuca ovina* – *Helictotrichon pratense*) grassland. Grasslands at this site range from hard-grazed short turf through to tall herb-rich vegetation, with transitions through to calcareous scrub and ash *Fraxinus excelsior*-dominated woodland. Taken together the ash woods of the ravines and slopes of the Dales comprise one of the largest areas of this habitat in Great Britain. There is also a great physical diversity due to rock outcrops, cliffs, screes and a variety of slope gradients and aspects. This is an area where northern species meet southern species such as the dwarf thistle *Cirsium acaule*. The relatively cold oceanic nature of the climate means that there is enrichment with northern floristic elements, such as limestone bedstraw *Galium sternerii* and globeflower *Trollius europaeus*.

There is a wide range of grassland, from that characterised by sheep's-fescue and meadow oat-grass through less calcareous types to, in places, an acidic heath grassland mosaic with heather *Calluna vulgaris*, bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*, dwarf gorse *Ulex gallii* and many other calcifugous (lime-hating) species. This heath can grade into a taller scrub dominated by dwarf gorse.

The site contains a large area of mixed woodland, dominated by ash *Fraxinus excelsior*. Locally, sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* is abundant. Lime *Tilia* spp. although not widely distributed can be a major component of some of the woods. The Dales provide good examples of woodland-scrub-grassland transitions, with associated rich invertebrate populations and plant communities. Among the uncommon plants present in the woods are mezereon *Daphne mezereum* and green hellebore *Helleborus viridis*, as well as whitebeams *Sorbus* spp. on the crags.

Other habitats in the dales include rock outcrops and scree. Dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* colonises scree along with oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius* and mouse-eared hawkweed *Hieracium pilosella*. Cliff ledges support a wide range of vegetation types from scrub and woodland, including species such as yew *Taxus baccata*, through to areas with only thin soils supporting tiny annual plants. Rock outcrops are typically colonised by early flowering species such as rue-leaved saxifrage *Saxifraga tridactylites* and shining cranesbill *Geranium lucidum*. Smaller species of ferns are often abundant and these include rusty-back *Ceterach officinarum* and green spleenwort *Asplenium viride*. This habitat in the Dales is one of the strongholds for the endemic moss *Brachythecium appelyardiae*. Dove Dale is one of the richest sites in the Peak District for lichens, in particular for saxicolous (rock-loving) species, such as *Clathroporina calcarea*, which occurs on vertical limestone crags, and *Solorina spongiosa* and *Verrucaria murina*. Spoil heaps of old lead mines support assemblages of plants indicative of metal-rich soils (metallophytes), including spring sandwort *Minuartia verna*, rock hutchinsia *Hornungia petraea* and alpine pennycress *Thlaspi alpestre*.

Many dales are dry but some have streams in winter only and some, permanent or semi-permanent rivers. These watercourses support important populations of brook lamprey *Lampetra planeri*, bullhead *Cottus gobio* and white-clawed crayfish *Austropotamobius pallipes*. A number of the dales also support fen vegetation associated with springs and flushes. These include alkaline fen vegetation, which supports species such as the common butterwort *Pinguicula vulgaris*.

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:

- Alkaline fens. (Calcium-rich springwater-fed fens)
- Calaminarian grasslands of the *Violetalia calaminariae*. (Grasslands on soils rich in heavy metals)
- Calcareous and calcshist screes of the montane to alpine levels (*Thlaspietea rotundifolii*). (Base-rich scree)
- Calcareous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation. (Plants in crevices in base-rich rocks)
- European dry heaths
- Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*). (Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone)
- *Tilio-Acerion* forests of slopes, screes and ravines. (Mixed woodland on base-rich soils associated with rocky slopes)*

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:

- Brook lamprey *Lampetra planeri*
- Bullhead *Cottus gobio*
- White-clawed (or Atlantic stream) crayfish *Austropotamobius pallipes*

Annex I priority habitats are denoted by an asterisk (*).

This citation relates to a site entered in the Register of European Sites for Great Britain.
Register reference number: UK0019859
Date of registration: 14 June 2005
Signed: *Trevor Salmon*
On behalf of the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs