

COUNTY: WILTSHIRE      SITE NAME: CLEY HILL

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

Local Planning Authorities: WEST WILTSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL, Wiltshire County Council

National Grid Reference: ST 838449      Area: 26.6 (ha.) 65.7 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 183      1:10,000: ST 84 NW & ST 84 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1975      Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1987      Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Within the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Owned by the National Trust.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Cley Hill is an area of botanically rich chalk grassland, supporting many of the plants characteristic of the downs of south and south-west England. The value of the site is enhanced by the occurrence of plant and animal species with a nationally restricted distribution.

The hill is an outlier of the Middle and Upper Chalk with a thin capping of Tertiary sands and gravels. It lies to the west of Warminster and rises some 80 m above the surrounding land with steep slopes of all aspects and a deep east-facing coombe.

The downland sward is dominated by upright brome *Bromus erectus* with abundant red fescue *Festuca rubra* and sheep's-fescue *Festuca ovina*. Much of this grassland is rich in chalk herbs with fairy flax *Linum catharticum*, yellow-wort *Blackstonia perfoliata*, wild thyme *Thymus praecox*, pyramidal orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis* and squinancywort *Asperula cynanchica* widespread. Certain species present in chalk grasslands are considered indicative of a long period of uninterrupted management without ploughing, fertilisers or herbicides. Those occurring here include betony *Stachys officinalis*, devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis* and frog orchid *Coeloglossum viride* on the south-east slopes, with fragrant orchid *Gymnadenia conopsea* and hairy rock-cress *Arabis hirsuta* more widespread. Meadow saxifrage *Saxifraga granulata* and heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens* are found on earthworks near the summit while chalk milkwort *Polygala calcarea* and autumn lady's-tresses *Spiranthes spiralis* grow on the slopes around the long disused quarry.

Cley Hill supports two plants which have a restricted distribution – early gentian *Gentianella anglica* and bastard-toadflax *Thesium humifusum* – and the uncommon

mosses *Entodon concinnus*, *Weissia controversa* var. *crispata* and *Fissidens incurvus*.

There are a few small areas of dense scrub on the site, mainly hawthorn, gorse and elder, with scattered scrub on the summit and southern slopes.

Although only limited invertebrate recording has been undertaken, several species of interest have been found. These include the nationally scarce adonis blue butterfly, the snail *Abida secale* and the plant bug *Sehirus dubius*. Other uncommon species occurring here are the wood tiger moth *Parasemia plantaginis* and the snails *Helicella itala* and *Pupilla muscorum*. In total, some twenty species of butterfly have been recorded, including the dingy skipper, brown argus and chalkhill blue. Buzzards, kestrels, goldfinches and a variety of other birds are regular visitors to the site and there is an active badger sett.

The site has many important archaeological features.