

File ref:

**County:** Northumberland **Site Name:** **Arcot Hall  
Grassland and  
Ponds**

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

**Local Planning Authority:** Blyth Valley District Council

**National Grid Reference:** NZ 249755 **Area:** 68.08 (ha) 168.23 (ac)

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50 000** 88 **1:10 000** NZ 27 NW, NE

**First Notified:** 1986 **Date of Revision:** 1993

**Description and Reasons for Notification:**

Arcot Hall Grasslands and Ponds comprises a complex of species-rich grasslands, with heaths, ponds and associated damp habitats. It supports probably the largest area of lowland species-rich unimproved grassland in North East England. The grassland contains a number of plant species now uncommon in the county. Both this grassland and the heathland are now extremely rare in Northumberland and threatened by agricultural improvement and development. The intricate mosaic of habitats and the occurrence of all stages of ecological succession from open water to woodland are particular features of the site. The site supports a population of the least minor moth *Photedes captiuncula*, a nationally rare species confined to a few localities in Northern England. The assemblage of invertebrates at the site is considered to be of regional importance and includes 33 species of water beetles.

The species-rich grassland and heath represent formerly more extensive areas of these habitats now in part dissected by a golf course. The dry grassland swards in the rough and on the pasture to the south comprise a diverse range of grasses and forbs including adder's-tongue *Ophioglossum vulgatum* and dyer's greenweed *Genista tinctoria*, both uncommon in Northumberland. Other species include yellow rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, common knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, common milkwort *Polygala vulgaris*, cat's-ear *Hypochaeris radicata* and eyebright *Euphrasia officinalis*. Common spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* and lesser butterfly-orchid *Platanthera bifolia* are locally abundant. In parts, this neutral grassland gives way to more acid grassland characterised by mat-grass *Nardus stricta*, tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens*, devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis* and betony *Stachys officinalis* and in wetter areas by glaucous sedge *Carex flacca* and the locally rare pepper-saxifrage *Silaum silaus*. This in turn is transitional to heath dominated by heather *Calluna vulgaris*. Encroachment by scrub including birch *Betula* sp., hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, gorse *Ulex europaeus* and blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* is occurring on both the grasslands and heath. Dense hawthorn and gorse scrub has developed.

Secondary woodland has developed on the unmanaged areas of the golf course dominated by downy birch *Betula pubescens* with hawthorn as part of the shrub layer. The ground layer includes bramble *Rubus fruticosus* and creeping soft-grass *Holcus mollis*.

Wetter areas have vegetation dominated by soft rush *Juncus effusus*, with a moss layer of *Sphagnum* in places with a relatively stable water table. A small area dominated by sharp-flowered rush *Juncus acutiflorus* is more species-rich, with herbs such as water mint *Mentha aquatica* and sneezewort *Achillea ptarmica*. Dense stands of bulrush *Typha latifolia* occur within the southern part of the site, in addition to small areas of floating sweet-grass *Glyceria fluitans*, the latter having common spike-rush *Eleocharis palustris*.

The main water area has formed in the last 20 years and is believed to be fed by upwelling water. The vegetation is at an early stage of colonisation, with few marginal emergent plants. Surrounding the pond is a zone of waterlogged ground with creeping bent *Agrostis stolonifera*, marsh foxtail *Alopecurus geniculatus*, with lesser spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*. The development of this pond has led to the flooding of part of a plantation dominated by beech *Fagus sylvatica*.

The main pond is used by wintering waterfowl and passage migrants.

**Other Information:**

1. During the 1993 revision the area of the site was increased.
2. This site is listed in the Invertebrate Site Register as being of regional importance for invertebrate conservation.