

County: Dorset

Site name: Canford Heath

District: Poole

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

Local Planning Authority: Poole Borough Council, Dorset County Council

National grid reference: SZ 028957

Area: 411.25 (ha) 1016.2 (ac)

Ordnance survey sheet: 1:50,000: 195

1:10,000: SZ 09 NW, SW

Date notified (under 1981 Act): 1985

Date of last revision: 1988

Other information:

Boundary revised by extension and deletion. Site added in 1988 to "A Nature Conservation Review" Ed D A Ratcliffe (Cambridge University Press 1977).

Description and reasons for notification:

Despite major reductions in size due to urban development in recent years, Canford Heath remains one of the largest heathland areas in Dorset. Development has consumed much of the lower-lying ground; the remaining heathland of Canford and Dunyeat's Hill occupies more elevated land on the acidic sands of the Bagshot Beds, overlain in part with Plateau Gravel. The site supports a number of the rare and local species characteristic of Dorset heathland.

Most of the heathland communities are of the dry or humid type with Heather *Calluna vulgaris*, Bell Heather *Erica cinerea*, Bristle Bent *Agrostis curtisii*, Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* and Cross-leaved Heath *Erica tetralix*. As on other heathland fragments in this part of the Poole Basin, the principal gorse species is Western Gorse *Ulex gallii*, though all three species of gorse are present. Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* occurs in association with peripheral stands of Downy Birch *Betula pubescens*, Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur* and Scots and Maritime Pines *Pinus sylvestris* and *P. maritime*, and in the drier valleys with richer soils.

Where drainage is impeded there are small areas of wet heath and bog in valley bottoms and along seepage features. Heather, Cross-leaved Heath and Purple Moor-grass are associated here with Deergrass *Trichophorum cespitosum*, Bog Asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum*, Common Cottongrass *Eriophorum angustifolium*, White Beak-sedge *Rhynchospora alba* and Round-leaved and Oblong-leaved Sundews *Drosera rotundifolia* and *D. intermedia*. The rare Dorset Heath *Erica ciliaris* occurs here in its most easterly recorded station and there is a range of bog mosses *Sphagnum* species, including the local *S. magellanicum* and very restricted *S. pulchrum*. There are several small bog pools and running water features.

The diversity of heathland vegetation types supports a corresponding range of heathland fauna. In dry heathland the rare Sand Lizard *Lacerta agilis* occurs, as does the similarly rare Smooth Snake *Coronella austriaca*. Both are specially protected species.* The Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*, a rare and restricted bird of southern heathland, breeds here in

nationally significant numbers. Other scarce heathland breeding birds at this site include Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*, Hobby *Falco subbuteo* and Woodlark *Lullula arborea*. Although wet heath and bog is limited in extent, the dragonfly fauna of Canford and Dunyeat's Hill is typically rich and includes the local Small Red Damselfly *Ceriagrion tenellum* and Keeled Orthetrum *Orthetrum caeruleum* and the rare Scarce Ischnura *Ischnura pumilio*. Other invertebrates of this site include: Heath Grasshopper *Chorthippus vagans*, a nationally rare species confined to certain heaths in East Dorset/West Hampshire; Bog Bush-cricket *Metrioptera brachyptera*, a local species of wet heathland; Woodland Grasshopper *Omocestus rufipes*, a local species, here in wood/heath edge; and Silver-studded Blue Butterfly *Plebejus argus*, a declining heathland species.

*These species are listed in Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.