

**Site Name:** Burlledge Sidelands and Meadows

**Unitary Authority:** Bath & North East Somerset

**District:** Bath & North East Somerset

**Status:** Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 substituted by Schedule 9 to the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000.

**Local Planning Authority:** Bath & North East Somerset Council

**National Grid reference:** ST593581

**Area:** 48.7 ha

**Ordnance Survey Sheet:** 1:50,000: 172/178

**1:10,000:** ST65NW;  
ST55NE

**Notification Date:** 30 November 2005

#### **Reasons for Notification:**

Burlledge Sidelands and Meadows is nationally important for a wide variety of species-rich unimproved neutral grassland communities characterised by crested dog's tail *Cynosurus cristatus* and common knapweed *Centaurea nigra*.

#### **General description:**

Burlledge Sidelands and Meadows SSSI supports one of the largest concentrations of species-rich unimproved hay meadows and pasture on the low hills of Mercia Mudstone (Keuper Marl) found between the Mendips and Bristol.

The site consists of sixteen fields, some managed as pasture and others cut for hay and aftermath-grazed, and with groups of adjoining fields frequently being managed, in effect, as single grazing units. Collectively, these fields are the surviving remnants of a much larger and more continuous tract of species-rich grassland that would once have been present in the area. The survival of the hay meadows and pastures at Burlledge Sidelands and Meadows SSSI is due to the long history of low intensity grassland management in this area. The neutral grassland includes hay meadows on the plateau hilltops and pastures on the steep slopes of the 'sidelands'. Subtly distinctive grassland communities are present, reflecting variation in geology, aspect, slope and management. Transitions to calcareous grassland occur where limestone and mudstones underly thinner soils, whilst classic neutral grassland communities are found where clay-rich soils are derived from Mercia Mudstone.

The most extensive areas of neutral grassland are characterised by grasses such as crested dog's-tail *C. cristatus*, sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, red fescue *Festuca rubra*, quaking-grass *Briza media* and Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus*. These swards are invariably species-rich, with the high cover of herbs typically including species such as meadow vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis*, oxeye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, common bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, selfheal *Prunella vulgaris*, common knapweed *C. nigra*, and agrimony *Agrimonia eupatoria*. Other herbs include rough hawkbit *Leontodon hispidus*, pepper-saxifrage *Silaum silaus*, devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis* and betony *Stachys officinalis*.

Transitions to more calcareous neutral grassland typically include quaking-grass, downy oat-grass *Helictotrichon pubescens* and patches of upright brome *Bromopsis erecta*, along with an abundance of herbs such as lady's bedstraw *Galium verum*, fairy flax *Linum catharticum*, hoary plantain *Plantago media*, dwarf thistle *Cirsium acaule*, burnet-saxifrage *Pimpinella saxifraga*, salad burnet *Sanguisorba minor* and wild thyme *Thymus polytrichus*. Heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens* also occurs in these more strongly calcareous swards, along with spring-sedge *Carex caryophyllea* and glaucous sedge *C. flacca*. In addition, the site contains several areas of grassland in which upright brome is the dominant grass.

The grassland supports a number of locally uncommon plant species that together contribute to the distinctiveness of the site, including saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria*, dyer's greenweed *Genista tinctoria*, woolly thistle *C. eriophorum*, corky-fruited water-dropwort *Oenanthe pimpinelloides* and lady's-mantle *Alchemilla filicaulis* ssp. *vestita*.