

File ref:

County: Durham **Site Name:** Far High House Meadows

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

Local Planning Authority: Wear Valley District Council

National Grid Reference: NY 839383 **Area:** 5.5 (ha) 13.6 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50 000 92 **1:10 000** NY 83 NW

First Notified: 1990

Other Information:

Description:

Far High House Meadows, situated in Upper Weardale, support important plant communities characteristic of northern hay meadows maintained by traditional farming methods. This habitat was formerly widespread but is now restricted in distribution in the Durham Dales due to the intensification of agricultural practices, particularly re-seeding and the use of artificial fertilisers. The site also includes a third field with grassland and species-rich flushes.

The hay fields at this site are dominated by the grasses common bent *Agrostis capillaris* and sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* with red fescue *Festuca rubra*, downy oat-grass *Avenula pubescens* and Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*. These meadow swards have an abundance of herb species with globeflower *Trollius europaeus* and marsh-marigold *Caltha palustris* particularly well represented. Other species present include marsh hawk's-beard *Crepis paludosa*, common knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, pignut *Conopodium majus*, bugle *Ajuga reptans*, yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor* and fairy flax *Linum catharticum*. Parts of the field have a sward dominated by sedges including common sedge *Carex nigra*, carnation sedge *S. panicea* and glaucous sedge *C. flacca*. The wettest part of these meadows support common butterwort *Pinguicula vulgaris*, dioecious sedge *C. dioica*, ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, marsh valerian *Valeriana dioica*, early-purple orchid *Orchis mascula* and marsh lousewort *Pedicularis palustris*.

The pasture is a mosaic of acidic upland grassland, dominated by mat-grass *Nardus stricta* and heath rush *Juncus squarrosus*, small areas of dry species-rich grassland and small soligenous flushes. Dry, base-rich banks support red fescue, common bent, common milkwort *Polygala vulgaris*, quaking grass *Briza media*, wild thyme *Thymus praecox*, spring sedge *Carex caryophyllea*, fairy flax and eyebright *Euphrasia* sp. The flushed areas are dominated by sedges and rushes including common yellow-sedge *C. demissa*, tawny sedge *C. hostiana*, long-stalked yellow-sedge *C. lepidocarpa*, star sedge *C. echinata*, jointed rush *Juncus articulatus* and sharp-flowered rush *J. acutiflorus*. Also

found in the flushes are common butterwort, marsh valerian, marsh lousewort, devils'-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, marsh arrowgrass *Triglochin palustris*, fen bedstraw *Galium uliginosum*, procumbent pearlwort *Sagina procumbens* and lesser clubmoss *Selaginella selaginoides*.