

File ref:

County: Durham **Site Name:** Grains O' Th' Beck Meadows

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

Local Planning Authority: Teesdale District Council

National Grid Reference: NY 872209 **Area:** 12.3 (ha) 30.4 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50 000 92 **1:10 000** NY 82 SE

First Notified: 1989

Other Information:

Description:

Grains O' Th' Beck Meadows are situated at over 300 m above sea level in Upper Lunedale and support important plant communities typical of northern hay meadows maintained by traditional farming methods. This habitat was formerly widespread but is now restricted in distribution in the Durham Dales and is threatened by continuing intensification of agricultural practices, particularly reseeding and the use of artificial fertilisers.

This site comprises three fields each with areas regularly cut for hay, steep banks and ground with impeded drainage which together support a wide range of species. The tall herbs melancholy thistle *Cirsium helenioides*, wood crane's-bill *Geranium sylvaticum* and globeflower *Trollius europaeus* which are particularly characteristic of northern hay meadows are well represented along with common bistort *Polygonum bistorta*, smooth lady's mantle *Alchemilla glabra*, pignut *Conopodium majus*, meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, water avens *Geum rivale*, ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi* and bulbous buttercup *Ranunculus bulbosus*. The uncut banks are especially species-rich and support, amongst others, alpine bistort *Polygonum viviparum*, which is rare in the Pennines, zigzag clover *Trifolium medium*, lesser stichwort *Stellaria graminea* and early-purple orchid *Orchis mascula*. Wetter parts of the field have an abundance of marsh-marigold *Caltha palustris*. The main species in the grass sward are common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, red fescue *Festuca rubra* and smooth meadow-grass *Poa pratensis*, with quaking grass *Briza media*, purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* and soft-brome *Bromus hordeaceus* also common.