

File ref:

County: Durham **Site Name:** Hesledon Moor East

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

Local Planning Authority: Durham County Council
Easington District Council

National Grid Reference: NZ 399466 **Area:** 6.0 (ha) (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50 000 88 **1:10 000** NZ 34 NE
NZ 44 NW

First Notified: 1998

Other Information:

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Hesledon Moor East supports two habitats of particular conservation importance. The majority of the site comprises unimproved neutral pasture, whilst a separate, smaller parcel of land to the south supports a base-rich mire. Scrub and flowing water add further interest to the site.

Unimproved neutral grassland occurs over the northern part of the site. Such grasslands were once widespread on the drift over the Magnesian Limestone of eastern Durham but have now almost disappeared as a result of agricultural intensification. The remaining areas are small and highly fragmented and that at Hesledon Moor East is one of the few intact examples on the plateau. The grassland here is of particular interest because in places it displays an acidic character, a feature which, although now virtually lost and even here only weakly developed, is considered to have been particularly characteristic of drift deposits in this area of the Magnesian Limestone. This illustrates an ecological link to the heathland at Hesledon Moor West, a neighbouring SSSI.

The neutral grassland is dominated by a mixture of common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, red fescue *Festuca rubra*, cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata*, yellow oat-grass *Trisetum flavescens*, glaucous sedge *Carex flacca*, quaking grass *Briza media* and heath grass *Danthonia decumbens*. Amongst these prominent broad-leaved herbs include common knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, autumn hawkbit *Leontodon autumnalis*, bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, meadow and bulbous buttercup *Ranunculus acris* and *R. bulbosus*, selfheal *Prunella vulgaris*, common sorrel *Rumex acetosa* and red clover *Trifolium pratense*. More local are the lady's mantle *Alchemilla xanthochlora*, common spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, eyebright *Euphrasia nemorosa*, cowslip *Primula veris*, pepper saxifrage *Silaum silaus*, devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis* and zigzag clover *Trifolium medium*.

Throughout the site soil conditions vary locally and are reflected in changes in sward composition. In some places, more acid, free-draining swards are dominated by common bent and sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina*, with scattered sheep's sorrel *Rumex acetosella*, harebell *Campanula rotundifolia*, tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, mat-grass *Nardus stricta* and, rarely, heather *Calluna vulgaris*. In other areas, principally alongside the stream soils are wetter and coarse grasslands have developed including soft rush *Juncus effusus* and hard rush *J. inflexus*, with tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa* or tall fescue *Festuca arundinacea*. Characteristic herbs of these areas include sneezewort *Achillea ptarmica*, lesser spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*, hairy sedge *Carex hirta* and marsh horsetail *Equisetum palustre*. Gorse *Ulex europaeus* and hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* scrub is scattered throughout the site.

On the southern parcel of the site vegetation typical of base and nutrient-rich soligenous mire is developed on a bank above the stream. Some areas are dominated by purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* and others by meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*. Associated species include wild angelica *Angelica sylvestris*, marsh thistle *Cirsium palustre*, common and glaucous sedge *Carex nigra* and *C. flacca*, hemp agrimony *Eupatorium cannabinum*, devil's-bit scabious and marsh valerian *Valeriana dioica*. The stream itself supports, amongst other species, the stonewort *Chara vulgaris* var. *papillata*, and lesser pondweed *Potamogeton pusillus*.