

COUNTY: SOMERSET

SITE NAME: BERROW DUNES

DISTRICT: SEDGEMOOR

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

Local Planning Authority: SOMERSET COUNTY COUNCIL, SEDGEMOOR DISTRICT COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: ST 293520

Area: 200 (ha) 494.3 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 182

1:10,000: ST 25 SE, ST 35 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1952

Date of Last Revision: 1972

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Nature Conservation Review Site. Site boundary amended since last Revision.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

This site provides a wide range of coastal habitats which includes salt marsh, fore, grey and yellow dunes, stable dune grassland, dune slacks, scrub and a freshwater lagoon. Berrow Dunes supports one of the most diverse floras in Somerset. 272 species of flowering plant have been recorded. 2 are nationally rare, while at least 10 have a restricted distribution in Britain. A rich invertebrate fauna with 3 nationally rare species and 21 notable species occurs, and the area is locally important for breeding and wintering birds. The dune system is of geomorphological interest.

The striking zonation of vegetation from the sea to the landward edge illustrates the dynamic nature of coastal plant communities. A salt marsh began to form at the beginning of the century on the west side of the dune system. 4 communities occur, dominated by (i) Common Cord-grass *Spartina anglica*, (ii) Red Fescue *Festuca rubra* and Saltmarsh Rush *Juncus gerardi*, (iii) Sea Clubrush *Scirpus maritimus* and (iv) Common Reed *Phragmites australis*. Other species associated with these communities include Long-bracted Sedge *Carex extensa*, Common Saltmarsh-grass *Puccinellia maritima*, Sea Rush *Juncus maritimus*, Sea Plantain *Plantago maritima*, Sea milkwort *Glaux maritima*, Sea Arrowgrass *Triglochin maritima*, Common Sea-lavender *Limonium vulgare* and Sea Aster *Aster tripolium*. A foredune is now forming on the seaward edge of this vegetation and is being colonized by Sand Couch *Elymus farctus*.

Yellow dunes of shifting sand behind the salt marsh have a variable cover of Marram *Ammophila arenaria*, Sand Sedge *Carex arenaria* and Portland Spurge *Euphorbia portlandica*. Dune crests support thickets of Sea-buckthorn *Hippophae rhamnoides*, together with Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* and Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*. The level of the land drops behind the dune crests, giving way to an extensive area of species-rich dune grassland dominated by Red Fescue *Festuca rubra*, Common Restharrow *Ononis repens* and Lady's Bedstraw *Galium verum*. Other species include Yellow Oat-grass *Trisetum flavescens*, Marram, Salad Burnet *Sanguisorba minor*, Soapwort *Saponaria officinalis*, Yellow Rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, Hare's-foot Clover *Trifolium arvense*, Eyebright *Euphrasia nemorosa*, Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis* and Bee Orchid *Ophrys apifera*. A small number of dune slacks occur. These support a wetland flora with Marsh Pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, Wild Celery *Apium graveolens*, Parsley Water-dropwort *Oenanthe lachenalii*, Common Fleabane *Pulicaria dysenterica*, Marsh Helleborine *Epipactis palustris*, Early Marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza incarnata* and Southern Marsh-orchid *D. praetermissa*. A small dune slack is one of only two native British stations for the Round-headed Club-rush *Scirpus holoschoenus*.

A large lagoon known as Berrow Marsh runs along the south-western edge of the dunes. This has developed from a saltmarsh that became enclosed by dunes on its seaward edge in the early 1900s. Whilst retaining some maritime influence, inundations of the sea are now very infrequent and the marsh is mainly freshwater in character. Common Reed predominates with Branched Bur-reed *Sparganium erectum*, Bulrush *Typha latifolia*, Sea Club-rush, Yellow iris *Iris pseudacorus* locally common. Berrow Marsh is the sole British locality for the Rush *Juncus subulatus*. Species with a restricted distribution in the county include: Marsh Arrowgrass *Triglochin palustris*, Common Meadow-rue *Thalictrum flavum*, Lesser Bulrush *Typha angustifolia* and Slender Tufted-sedge *Carex acuta*.

A rich invertebrate fauna is associated with these habitats. 14 species of dragonfly have been recorded including the notable Hairy Dragonfly *Brachytron pretense* and Ruddy Darter *Sympetrum sanguineum*. Beetles are particularly well represented with 14 notable species and the nationally rare Greater Silver Diving Beetle *Hydrophilus piceus*. 2 nationally rare species of Soldier Fly are also present: *Stratiomys furcata* and *S. potamida*. Breeding birds with a local distribution in Somerset include Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* and Red Warbler *A. scirpaceus*. Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*, Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*, Merlin *Falco columbarius*, Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* and Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* are regular winter visitors.