

COUNTY: SUFFOLK

SITE NAME: IPSWICH HEATHS

DISTRICT: SUFFOLK COASTAL

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

Local Planning Authority: Suffolk Coastal District Council

National Grid Reference: TM 212427 &
TM 238448

Area: 42.8 (ha.) 105.8 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:

1:10,000: TM 24 SW & NW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): –

Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1988

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

A new site.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Martlesham and Purdis Heaths are the best remnants of a formerly extensive tract of heathland which lay to the east of Ipswich, and formed the southern limit of the 'sandlings' heaths of East Suffolk. Both contain substantial areas of heather *Calluna vulgaris* heath and acid grassland, together with stands of bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and gorse *Ulex europaeus* scrub. These communities grade into one another to form a mosaic of habitats of particular value for butterflies. Martlesham Heath is notable for supporting the largest colony of the silver-studded blue butterfly in East Anglia, as well as a number of other species.

The heather heath is of mixed age, reflecting a history of accidental fires. Most areas are showing vigorous regeneration, but invasion by bracken, gorse and birch *Betula pendula* occurs, particularly at Purdis Heath. Amongst regenerating heather, bare ground is often colonized by mosses and lichens, with sheep's sorrel *Rumex acetosella*, rosebay willowherb *Chamerion angustifolium* and other species appearing amongst slightly older stands. Bell heather *Erica cinerea* is quite frequent on mature heath, especially on the transition to acid grassland or bracken.

The acid grassland which occupies substantial areas of the site is composed mainly of bent *Agrostis* spp. and fescue *Festuca* spp grasses, with frequent early hair-grass *Aira praecox*. Where acid grassland forms a mosaic with heath there is a wider range of associated species, such as heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile*, cat's-ear *Hypochoeris radicata*, mouse-ear hawkweed *Hieracium pilosella* and common centaury *Centaureum erythraea*. It is this mixture of short rabbit grazed grassland interspersed with clumps of heather that favours the silver-studded blue, together with common blue and small heath butterflies.

Secondary woodland of young oak *Quercus robur* and birch is confined mainly to the outlying parts of the site and supports a variety of birds including nightingale, whitethroat, willow warbler and tawny owl.