

COUNTY: EAST SUSSEX SITE NAME: PAINES CROSS MEADOW

DISTRICT: WEALDEN

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

Local Planning Authority: WEALDEN DISTRICT COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: TQ 616238 Area: 3.66 (ha.) 9.04 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 199 1:10,000: TQ 62 SW

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1991

Other Information:

This is a new site.

Description of Site and Reasons for Notification:

Paines Cross Meadow is a small area of damp grassland with fragments of vegetation associated with a spring line known as 'fen meadow'. The site lies on a gentle west facing slope above a tributary of the River Rother and has the only known example in the county of a type of fen meadow which has become rare as a result of agricultural improvement. Paines Cross Meadow also supports a number of plants with a restricted county distribution. The meadow lies on heavy clay typical of the Weald with localized areas of peat which have formed around the springs.

Much of the meadow has a mosaic of grasses including common bent-grass *Agrostis capillaris* and sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* interspersed with tussocks of purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* and other plant such as marsh thistle *Cirsium palustre* and greater bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus uliginosus*.

Of particular interest are the fen meadow fragments dominated by purple moor-grass. The presence of fen meadow in Sussex is unusual as it is more typical of South West England and East Anglia. At Paines Cross two variants of the community can be identified. Firstly, along the northern side of the meadow there is a community containing plants such as green-ribbed sedge *Carex binervis*, creeping willow *Salix repens*, heather *Calluna vulgaris*, cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix*, dwarf gorse *Ulex minor*, heath grass *Danthonia decumbens* and lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica*. Secondly, along the southern edge the purple moor-grass is joined by a range of marshland species such as wild angelica *Angelica sylvestris*, hemp agrimony *Eupatorium cannabinum*, water mint *Mentha aquatica* and meadow thistle *Cirsium dissectum*.

Of greatest interest is the fragment of fen meadow which remains around the spring in the middle of the lower part of the meadow. Around the spring head there are large hummocks of moss including *Sphagnum palustre*, *S. subnitens* and *S. papillosum*. The peaty soil here supports several other species of flowering plants which are uncommon in East Sussex including cotton grass *Eriophorum angustifolium*, bog

pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*, bog asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum*, southern marsh orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* and star sedge *Carex echinata*.

The meadow supports a wide variety of invertebrates including populations of the great green bush cricket *Tettigonia viridissima*, dark bush cricket *Pholidoptera griseoptera* and butterflies such as common blue *Polyommatus icarus* and gatekeeper *Pyronia tithonus*.