

COUNTY: WILTSHIRE      SITE NAME: RACK HILL

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

Local Planning Authority: NORTH WILTSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: ST 842762      Area: 10.6 (ha.) 26.1 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 173      1:10,000: ST 87 NW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1975      Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985      Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Previously notified under the 1949 Act as part of the West Yatton Down and Rack Hill SSSI.

Reasons for Notification:

The best known example in Wiltshire of a lightly grazed Jurassic Limestone sward with a mosaic of grassland scrub transitions supporting a diverse butterfly population.

The lightly grazed sward is dominated by upright brome *Bromus erectus* and tor grass *Brachypodium pinnatum*. Coarse, relatively species-poor, grassland grades into areas of shorter turf with many typical limestone grassland herbs. Dwarf thistle *Cirsium acaule*, small scabious *Scabiosa columbaria*, devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis* and common restharrow *Ononis repens* occur widely. More restricted are clustered bellflower *Campanula glomerata*, purging flax *Linum catharticum*, yellow-wort *Blackstonia perfoliata* and common centaury *Centaureum erythraea*.

Colonisation by scrub of a range of age classes has reduced the extent of the open grassland, but has created shelter for invertebrates and birds. Typical calcicolous scrub species present include wayfaring tree *Viburnum lantana*, buckthorn *Rhamnus catharticus*, spindle *Euonymus europaeus* and privet *Ligustrum vulgare*. Gorse *Ulex europaeus* occurs as several extensive thickets; some of which are recently established. More mature scrub of hawthorn, oak and ash grades into clumps of oak and ash secondary woodland at the north of Rack Hill.

More extensive unenclosed woodland at the south of the site, consists of mature planted beech surrounded by self-sown natural regeneration of oak, ash and birch. Field maple is present locally along a boundary bank; with scrubby hazel coppice nearby. The ground flora includes dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, enchanter's nightshade *Circaea lutetiana*, bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, false brome *Brachypodium sylvaticum*, and a colony of stinking hellebore *Helleborus foetidus*.

The mixture of grassland, scrub and woodland supports a varied butterfly fauna; with more than 20 resident breeding species recently listed. Species of tall grassland and scrub include the marbled white *Melanargia galathea*, green hairstreak *Callophrys rubi* and dark green fritillary *Argynnis aglaja*. More shade tolerant butterflies are represented by the speckled wood *Lasiommata megera*, ringlet *Aphantopus hyperantus* and comma *Polygonia c-album*.