

Site name: Pinkworthy and Driver Farm

County: Somerset

District: West Somerset

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

Local Planning Authority: Exmoor National Park Authority, West Somerset Council, Somerset County Council.

Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 sheets: 180

National grid reference: SS732408

Notification date: 7 January 2021

Area: 69.90 ha

Reasons for notification:

Pinkworthy and Driver Farm SSSI is of special interest for its nationally important assemblage of grassland fungi and for its species-rich lowland dry acid grassland and rush pasture.

General description:

Pinkworthy and Driver Farm is situated close to the Devon-Somerset border in the upper catchment of the River Barle, which drains much of upland Exmoor before flowing eastward to join the River Exe. The site lies 3-5 km to the west of the village of Simonsbath and ranges in altitude from 370 m to 460 m. It comprises two discrete areas of land. Pinkworthy Farm to the west, occupies a ridge between the River Barle and a neighbouring tributary, including pastures with a gently sloping southerly aspect and steeper valley sides facing west and east. Driver Farm to the east, comprises a Y-shaped valley system with a similar range of slope and aspect.

The underlying geology is of Devonian slates of the Kentisbury Member, while the valleys drain higher land underlain by the Coombe Martin Slates. These give rise to thin, generally acidic soils on the ridges and slopes, while the valley bottoms have alluvial deposits of clays, sands and gravels.

The whole site lies within an area of enclosed land characterised by stone walls and earth hedge banks, sometimes topped by remnant beech *Fagus sylvatica* hedges. Prior to enclosure the area would have been moorland, as the surrounding hills still are, with areas of valley fen and mire. Much of the enclosed land in the area has been drained, ploughed and reseeded as improved pasture but these two areas comprise remnants of largely semi-natural unimproved grassland.

Species-rich lowland dry acid grassland

Both parts of the site support acidic grassland across most of the area, characterised by abundant common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina*, sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and field wood-rush *Luzula campestris*, with Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus* locally frequent in the flatter, slightly more mesotrophic pastures. Typical herbs include tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile*, mouse-ear-hawkweed *Pilosella officinarum*, common bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata* and common cat's-ear *Hypochaeris radicata*.

On the steeper valley sides more diverse communities include pill sedge *Carex pilulifera*, green-ribbed sedge *C. binervis*, heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens*, great wood-rush *Luzula sylvatica*, purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* and mat-grass *Nardus stricta*, with heather *Calluna vulgaris*, bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*, lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica*, eyebright *Euphrasia officinalis* agg. and heath speedwell *Veronica officinalis*. Mosses form a significant component of the sward, predominantly springy turf-moss *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus* and neat feather-moss *Pseudoscleropodium purum*, along with glittering wood-moss *Hylocomium splendens*, heath plait-moss *Hypnum jutlandicum* and red-stemmed feather-moss *Pleurozium schreberi*. Scattered bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* occurs on most slopes, occasionally forming larger patches.

Rush pasture

Flatter areas in the valley bottoms support extensive stands of wetland vegetation in which sharp-flowered rush *Juncus acutiflorus* and, to a lesser extent, soft-rush *J. effusus* predominate. These areas also support a species-rich assemblage of plants including greater bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus pedunculatus*, marsh bedstraw *Galium palustre*, lesser spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*, devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, marsh willowherb *Epilobium palustre*, star sedge *Carex echinata*, marsh thistle *Cirsium palustre*, marsh pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, marsh violet *Viola palustris*, lesser skullcap *Scutellaria minor*, creeping forget-me-not *Myosotis secunda* and velvet bent *Agrostis canina*. The moss species pointed spear-moss *Calliergonella cuspidata*, fern-leaved hook-moss *Cratoneuron filicinum*, marsh thyme-moss *Plagiomnium ellipticum* and straw spear-moss *Straminergon stramineum* also occur with small quantities of flat-topped bog-moss *Sphagnum fallax*.

Assemblage of grassland fungi

Pinkworthy and Driver Farm supports a nationally important assemblage of grassland fungi. Since 1997, 28 species of waxcap *Hygrocybe* s.l.¹ and 19 pinkgill *Entoloma* s.l. species have been recorded on the site, together with six species of clubs, corals and spindles (clavarioid fungi) and four earthtongues (geoglossoid fungi).

Seven of the waxcap species which have been recorded on the site are listed as 'Vulnerable' on the global IUCN Red List of Threatened Species: blushing waxcap *Neohygrocybe ovina*, citrine waxcap *Hygrocybe citrinovirens*, crimson waxcap *H. punicea*, splendid waxcap *H. splendidissima*, grey waxcap *Cuphophyllus lacmus*, pink waxcap *Porpolomopsis calyptriformis* and date waxcap *H. spadicea*. Other waxcap species recorded here that are indicative of high quality grassland fungi sites include yellow foot waxcap *Cuphophyllus flavipes* and fibrous waxcap *H. intermedia*.

Of the pinkgills, big blue pinkgill *Entoloma bloxamii* (agg.), lilac pinkgill *E. porphyrophaeum* and mealy pinkgill *E. prunuloides* are listed as 'Vulnerable' on the global IUCN Red List, as are two of the earthtongues: dark-purple earthtongue *Microglossum atropurpureum* (agg.) and short-spored earthtongue *Trichoglossum walteri*.

¹ *Sensu lato*, meaning 'in a broad sense', used here to indicate that the genus includes taxa previously assigned to it.