

EC Directive 92/43 on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora

Citation for Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

Name:	The New Forest
Unitary Authority/County:	Hampshire, Wiltshire
SAC status:	Designated on 1 April 2005
Grid reference:	SU225075
SAC EU code:	UK0012557
Area (ha):	29262.36
Component SSSI:	Landford Bog SSSI, Langley Wood and Homan's Copse SSSI, Loosehanger Copse and Meadows SSSI, Roydon Woods SSSI, The New Forest SSSI, Whiteparish Common SSSI

Site description:

The New Forest embraces the largest area of 'unsown' vegetation in lowland England and includes the representation on a large scale of habitats formerly common but now fragmented and rare in lowland western Europe. The intimate mosaic of habitats owes much to the local geology and traditional commoning grazing system, a situation which is uncommon in lowland England. The habitats include lowland heath, valley and seepage step mire, or fen, and ancient pasture woodland, including riparian and bog woodland. Nowhere else do these habitats occur in combination and on so large a scale. Within the matrix of habitats are pasture woodland and scrub dominated by oak, beech and holly; heathland and associated grassland; wet heath, valley mire-fen and plantations dating from various periods since the early 18th century, and a range of acid to neutral grasslands.

The New Forest contains the most extensive areas of active wood-pasture in north west Europe comprising mature, semi-natural beech *Fagus sylvatica*, which represent Atlantic beech forests in the most southerly part of the habitat's range, together with old oak *Quercus* spp. This mosaic, with other types of woodland and heath, has allowed unique and varied assemblages of epiphytic lichens and saproxylic (dead wood) invertebrates – in particular the stag beetle, *Lucanus cervus* – to be sustained in situations where the woodland is open and the tree trunks receive sunlight.

Occasionally in wet hollows, birch – willow *Betula* – *Salix* stands occur over valley bog vegetation, with fringing alder *Alnus* – *Sphagnum* stands where there is some water movement. These stands of bog woodland appear to have persisted for long periods in stable association with the underlying *Sphagnum* bog-moss communities. The rich epiphytic lichen communities and pollen record provide evidence for the persistence of this association.

The Forest also contains many streams and small rivers some of which are less affected by drainage and canalisation than those in any other comparable area in the lowlands of England. Associated with many of the streams, particularly those with alkaline and neutral groundwater, are areas of alder *Alnus glutinosa* woodland which, collectively, form an extensive resource with a rich flora. In places there are examples of transitions from open water through reedswamp and fen to alder woodland. In other places there are transitions to oak woods and beech forests with holly and sometimes yew in the shrub layer.

The site contains the most extensive stands of lowland northern Atlantic wet heaths in southern England, mainly of the *Erica tetralix* – *Sphagnum compactum* type; *Schoenus nigricans* – *Narthecium ossifragum* mire is also found on this site. The wet heaths are

important for rare plants, such as marsh gentian *Gentiana pneumonanthe* and marsh clubmoss *Lycopodiella inundata*, and a number of dragonfly species, including the scarce blue-tailed damselfly *Ischnura pumilio*, southern damselfly *Coenagrion mercuriale* and small red damselfly *Ceriagrion tenellum*.

The largest area of lowland dry heathland in the UK is also found in the Forest. It is particularly important for the diversity of its habitats and the range of rare and scarce species it supports. The dry heaths of the New Forest comprise two main communities; the *Calluna vulgaris* – *Ulex minor* heath type, and *Ulex minor* – *Agrostis curtisii* heath type. There are a wide range of transitions between dry heath and wet heath, *Molinia* grassland, fen, acid grassland and various types of scrub and woodland. The New Forest *Molinia* meadows are unusual in the UK in terms of their species composition and management. The healthy form of *Molinia caerulea* – *Cirsium dissectum* fen-meadow occurs in areas of heavy grazing by ponies and cattle in areas known locally as ‘lawns’, often in a fine-scale mosaic with wet heaths and other mire and grassland communities. These lawns occur on flushed soils on slopes and on level terrain on the floodplains of rivers and streams. The grasslands are species-rich, and particular features are the abundance of small sedges such as carnation sedge *Carex panicea*, common sedge *C. nigra* and yellow-sedge *C. viridula* ssp. *oedocarpa*, and the more frequent occurrence of mat-grass *Nardus stricta* and petty whin *Genista anglica* compared to stands elsewhere in the UK.

Hatchet Pond, and associated ponds, are examples of oligotrophic (nutrient-poor) waterbodies amidst wet and dry lowland heath developed over fluvial deposits. It contains shoreweed *Littorella uniflora* and isolated populations of northern species such as bog orchid *Hammarbya paludosa* and floating bur-reed *Sparganium angustifolium*, alongside rare southern species such as Hampshire-purslane *Ludwigia palustris*. This pond is important as a southern example of this lake type where northern species, more common in the uplands of the UK, co-exist with southern species.

The site also contains nutrient-poor vegetation on the edge of large temporary ponds, shallow ephemeral pools and poached damp hollows in grassland, which support a number of specialist species in a zone with toad rush *Juncus bufonius*. These include the two nationally scarce species coral-necklace *Illecebrum verticillatum* and yellow centaury *Cicendia filiformis*, often in association with allseed *Radiola linoides* and chaffweed *Anagallis minima*. Continuous grazing pressure is of prime importance in the maintenance of the outstanding flora of these temporary pond communities. Temporary ponds occur throughout the Forest in depressions capable of holding water for part of the year. Most ponds are small (between 5-10m across) and, although great in number, amount to less than 10ha in total area. Many of these contain great crested newt, *Triturus cristatus*.

Qualifying habitats: The site is designated under **article 4(4)** of the Directive (92/43/EEC) as it hosts the following habitats listed in Annex I:

- Alkaline fens. (Calcium-rich springwater-fed fens)
- Alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior* (*Alno-Padion*, *Alnion incanae*, *Salicion albae*). (Alder woodland on floodplains)*
- *Asperulo-Fagetum* beech forests. (Beech forests on neutral to rich soils)
- Atlantic acidophilous beech forests with *Ilex* and sometimes also *Taxus* in the shrublayer (*Quercion robori-petraeae* or *Ilici-Fagenion*). (Beech forests on acid soils)
- Bog woodland*
- Depressions on peat substrates of the *Rhynchosporion*
- European dry heaths
- *Molinia* meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (*Molinion caeruleae*). (Purple moor-grass meadows)
- Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix*. (Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath)
- Old acidophilous oak woods with *Quercus robur* on sandy plains. (Dry oak-dominated woodland)
- Oligotrophic to mesotrophic standing waters with vegetation of the *Littorelletea uniflorae* and/or of the *Isoeto-Nanojuncetea*. (Clear-water lakes or lochs with aquatic vegetation and poor to moderate nutrient levels)
- Oligotrophic waters containing very few minerals of sandy plains: *Littorelletalia uniflorae*. (Nutrient-poor shallow waters with aquatic vegetation on sandy plains)
- Transition mires and quaking bogs. (Very wet mires often identified by an unstable 'quaking' surface)

Qualifying species: The site is designated under **article 4(4)** of the Directive (92/43/EEC) as it hosts the following species listed in Annex II:

- Great crested newt *Triturus cristatus*
- Southern damselfly *Coenagrion mercuriale*
- Stag beetle *Lucanus cervus*

Annex I priority habitats are denoted by an asterisk (*).

This citation relates to a site entered in the Register of European Sites for Great Britain.

Register reference number: UK0012557

Date of registration: 14 June 2005

Signed: *Trevor Salmon*

On behalf of the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs