



Hog Cliff

National Nature Reserve



Welcome to Hog Cliff National Nature Reserve

Hog Cliff National Nature Reserve (NNR) is notified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and also forms part of the wider Cerne and Sydling Downs Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Additionally, the reserve lies within the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). In total the reserve covers an area of 84 hectares or 210 acres.

This spectacular and varied National Nature Reserve is principally important for areas of unimproved chalk downland with species rich grassland communities typical of the chalk of west-central Dorset. There are good populations of the Marsh Fritillary butterfly, a scarce species throughout Europe, as well as other butterflies including the Adonis Blue. Areas of woodland and scrub provide additional habitat diversity. The combination of chalk grassland, scrub and

Marsh Fritillary



© Natural England / Allan Drewitt



© Natural England / Monique Hustinx

Flower-rich grassland with Devil's Bit Scabious

woodland on steep slopes facing all parts of the compass at every aspect creates an intimate and enclosed landscape and an exceptionally diverse range of habitats and wildlife for the visitor to enjoy.

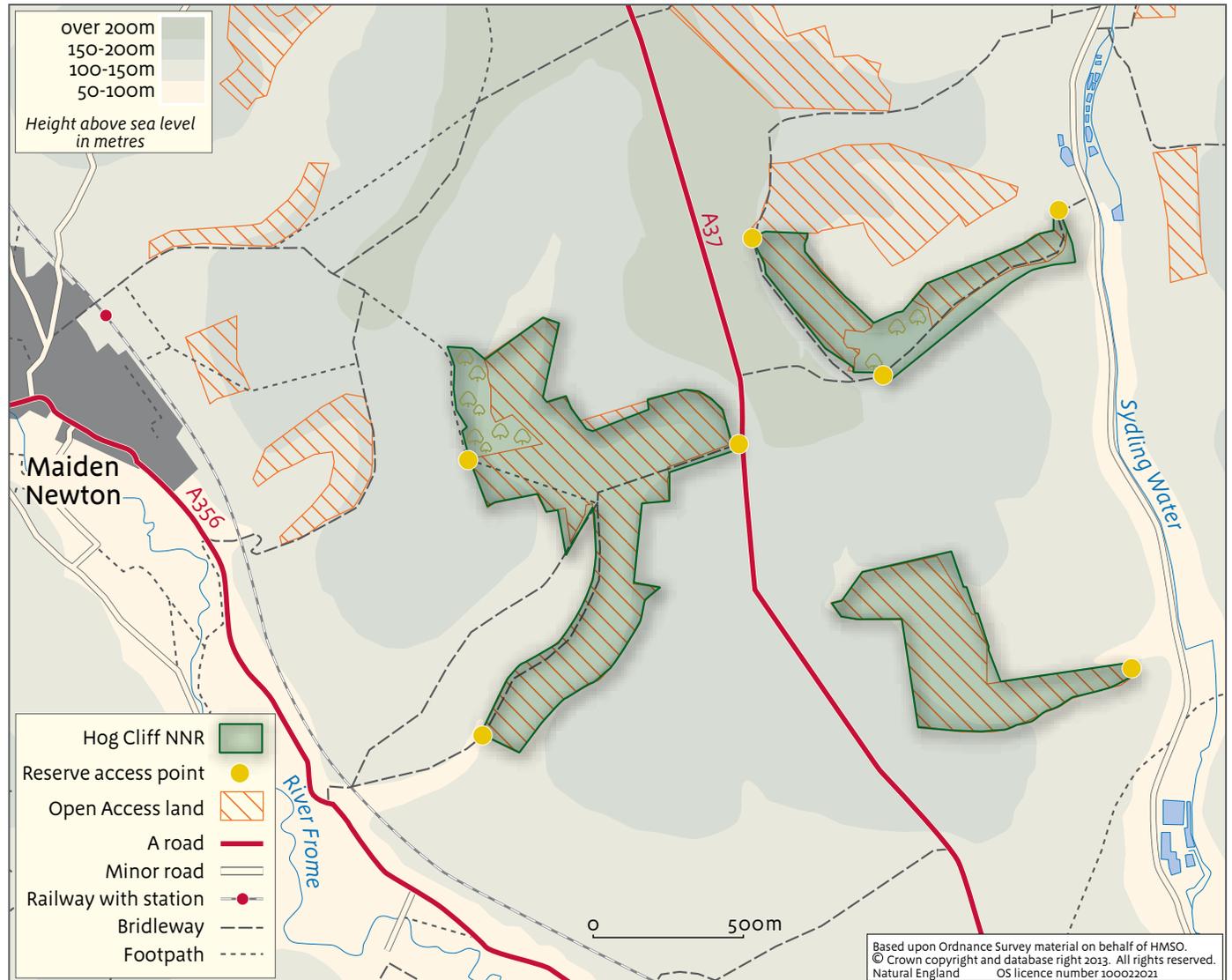
The best species rich chalk grassland within the National Nature Reserve is found on the steeper slopes that have avoided modern intensive agricultural practices such as ploughing and addition of artificial fertiliser. Traditional grazing and farming methods have shaped the landscape and habitats of the NNR and allowed the rich chalk downland and associated wildlife to evolve over centuries. This traditional management has also preserved local archaeology. Medieval field patterns, strip lynchets and old field boundaries are all found within the reserve and are visible across the landscape in this beautiful part of Dorset.



Visiting the reserve

Hog Cliff National Nature Reserve is made up of three separate areas of land located 5 miles north-west of Dorchester, due south of the small village of Sydling St Nicholas and close to Maiden Newton. All parts of the reserve are open to the public for access on foot, with some additional bridleway access.

Please be aware that because the site is grazed all year round with cattle and sheep you should keep all dogs under close control and on a lead if livestock are present. If you feel threatened by cattle or if they behave aggressively stay calm, move slowly away and let your dog off the lead.



By car - parking is limited but possible on a lay-by on the nearby A37 which separates the 3 areas of the reserve.

By cycle - Maiden Newton is on the route of the Wessex Ridgeway trail. It is also on Route 26 of Sustrans National Cycle Network.

By train - the reserve can be accessed on foot via

public rights of way that link to Maiden Newton train station

By bus - bus services run from Dorchester along both the A356 and A37 to local towns. See the Traveline SW website for details.

The nearest toilet and refreshment facilities are in Maiden Newton.



© Natural England / Peter Wakeley

Adonis Blue

Management

The main objective of management is to maintain the chalk grassland habitat which has evolved over centuries of traditional grazing management. Cattle and sheep roam over large extensive areas within the reserve throughout the year and this helps control scrub and vigorous grasses and keeps the grassland sward open to benefit wildflowers and insects.

The aim is to create a mixed sward with a patchy mosaic of long and short grassy areas across the reserve. This maximises habitat diversity within the grassland and is essential in order to provide suitable conditions for all the wildlife found on the reserve.

Managed scrub provides an important habitat for a range of wildlife including breeding birds, small mammals and invertebrates. Scrub is often found along the top of steeper slopes and this

provides a buffer against the more intensively managed agricultural land that typically surrounds the NNR. Scrub also has a function within the landscape of the NNR and enhances the intimate sense of enclosure for the visitor. Scrub can also invade the open grassland and consequently in the winter some scrub is often cut back. Occasionally more mature established scrub is cut and allowed to re-grow to create structural diversity within the scrub which also benefits wildlife.

Traditionally managed hedgerows can be seen within the reserve and often follow old field boundaries. Over time and without appropriate management hedgerows can become 'gappy' and lose structure. Some hedgerows are being re-planted within the NNR and existing hedgerows are also laid in a traditional manner.



© Natural England / P N Watts

Yellow Hammer

Hog Cliff Bottom



© Natural England / Simon Melville

Wildlife

The grassland supports a wide range of grasses, herbs and flowering plants including Sheep's Fescue, Horseshoe Vetch, Autumn Gentian, Clustered Bellflower, Rockrose, Small Scabious, Devil's Bit Scabious, Chalk Milkwort and Betony. Over 100 species of fungi have been recorded including eight species of Waxcap.

Butterflies found on the reserve during the summer include the rare Adonis Blue and Marsh Fritillary as well as more common species such as the Green Hairstreak, Common Blue, Gatekeeper, Grizzled Skipper and Dingy Skipper.

The small areas of ancient woodland are mostly Oak and Ash standards with a Hazel and Field Maple understorey. The woodland has been shown to be particularly important for a range of rare lichens. Historically some of the woodland has been managed as coppice. There is a rich spring ground flora which includes some uncommon plants including Herb Paris and Toothwort.

Sleepy Dormouse



© Henry Stanier @wilidifebcn.org



© Natural England / Chris Comersall

Clustered Bellflower

Further information

If you would like to get involved in helping us to look after the reserve, or to find out more, contact site staff on **07810 297886**.

Front cover image: Hog Cliff NNR

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