

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

Citation for Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

Name: Simonside Hills
Unitary Authority/County: Northumberland
SAC status: Designated on 1 April 2005
Grid reference: NY982970
SAC EU code: UK0030336
Area (ha): 2082.60
Component SSSI: Simonside Hills SSSI

Site description:

This site comprises part of the Simonside Hills, a sandstone-ridge in central Northumberland. It is particularly important for the extent of heather *Calluna vulgaris* moorland which grades into blanket mire on wetter ground. A large proportion of the dry heather moorland is managed by rotational burning for grouse and this has produced a characteristic pattern of even-aged stands of heather with few accompanying species. Some older stands however support a variety of typical heathland mosses including, on some north facing slopes, *Sphagnum capillifolium* and *Plagiothecium undulatum*. Lesser twayblade *Listera cordata* is present in some of the more luxuriant stands. On the high plateau there is blanket bog with heather and hares-tail cottongrass *Eriophorum vaginatum* in which cloudberry *Rubus chamaemorus* occurs sparingly. Shallow basins which collect water draining from the surrounding land are characterised by carpets of bog-mosses *Sphagnum papillosum*, *S. magellanicum*, *S. capillifolium* and *S. pulchrum* with species such as cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix*, bog rosemary *Andromeda polifolia* and cranberry *Vaccinium oxycoccus*.

Soligenous mires contribute significantly to the floristic diversity of the site. Base-rich types are dominated by sharp-flowered rush *Juncus acutiflorus* with marsh valerian *Valeriana dioica*, marsh pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, fairy flax *Linum catharticum*, common butterwort *Pinguicula vulgaris* and, more rarely, grass-of-Parnassus *Parnassia palustris*. One flush system has black bog-rush *Schoenus nigricans* and there are several with bog-myrtle *Myrica gale*. Both these species have a western distribution in Britain and are unusual in the eastern counties. More acidic flushes support either soft rush *Juncus effusus* with the bog-moss *Sphagnum recurvum* or star sedge *Carex echinata*, bog asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum*, round-leaved sundew *Drosera rotundifolia* and cross-leaved heath. Bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* and crowberry *Empetrum nigrum* are particularly associated with gritstone crags and bearberry *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi* may also be present in such localities.

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:

- Blanket bogs*
- European dry heaths

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: UK0030336

Date of registration: 14 June 2005

Signed: *Trevor Salmon*

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