

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

Citation for Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

Name:	West Dorset Alder Woods
Unitary Authority/County:	Dorset
SAC status:	Designated on 1 April 2005
Grid reference:	SY538968
SAC EU code:	UK0030299
Area (ha):	329.29
Component SSSI:	Aunt Mary's Bottom SSSI, Frome St Quintin SSSI, Mapperton and Poorton Vales SSSI, Powerstock Common and Wytherston Farm SSSI, Toller Porcorum SSSI, Woolcombe SSSI

Site description:

This site covers a complex of mixed ash-alder *Fraxinus excelsior*-*Alnus glutinosa* woods that occur as sinuous valley woods along the headwaters of calcareous streams and on areas of groundwater seepage. The woods vary from those with greater tussock-sedge *Carex paniculata*, remote sedge *C. remota*, hemlock water-dropwort *Oenanthe crocata*, opposite-leaved golden-saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* and alternate-leaved golden-saxifrage *C. alternifolium*, to transitions to drier oak-ash woodland with ramsons *Allium ursinum*.

Several of the component woods are associated with valley mires with transitions to fen, reedswamp, fen-meadow (dominated by purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*) and acid grassland. Characteristic features of the woods are the shallow silty peats and tufa deposits which support an outstanding assemblage of specialised invertebrates. The streams have natural meanders, back channels and debris dams, features that are otherwise rare in the lowlands. Ancient stands of ash-alder woodland have developed some 'old growth' characteristics with associated old forest lichens.

Pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* high forest is present on free draining sandy soils with an open understorey of occasional holly, hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and locally hazel coppice. Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* is abundant with greater stitchwort *Stellaria holostea*, creeping soft-grass *Hoculus mollis* and locally, bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*.

The site also covers a mosaic of grassland and scrub habitats, with a flushed grassland and fen component that supports a marsh fritillary butterfly *Euphydryas aurinia* population. Also, on the northern edge of Powerstock Common a series of ponds supports a population of great crested newts *Triturus cristatus*. The ponds range from heavily shaded to unshaded and most are sparsely vegetated by floating sweet-grass *Glyceria fluitans* and common duckweed *Lemna minor* communities. The particular combination and juxtaposition of aquatic and terrestrial habitats in this area provide ideal breeding, foraging and hibernation conditions for the great crested newt.

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:

- Alluvial forests with *Alnus glutinosa* and *Fraxinus excelsior* (*Alno-Padion*, *Alnion incanae*, *Salicion alvae*). (Alder woodland on floodplains)*
- *Molinia* meadows on calcareous, peaty or clayey-silt-laden soils (*Molinion caeruleae*). (Purple moor-grass meadows)
- Old acidophilous oak woods with *Quercus robur* on sandy plains. (Dry oak-dominated woodland)

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:

- Marsh fritillary butterfly *Euphydryas* (*Eurodryas*, *Hypodryas*) *aurinia*
- Great crested newt *Triturus cristatus*

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: UK0030299
Date of registration: 14 June 2005

Signed: *Trevor Salmon*

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