

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

## Citation for Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

<b>Name:</b>	South Wight Maritime
<b>Unitary Authority/County:</b>	Isle of Wight
<b>SAC status:</b>	Designated on 1 April 2005
<b>Grid reference:</b>	SZ462771
<b>SAC EU code:</b>	UK0030061
<b>Area (ha):</b>	19862.71
<b>Component SSSI:</b>	Bembridge Down SSSI, Bonchurch Landslips SSSI, Compton Down SSSI, Compton Chine to Steephill Cove SSSI, Headon Warren and West High Down SSSI, Whitecliff Bay and Bembridge Ledges SSSI

### Site description:

South Wight Maritime contains contrasting Cretaceous hard cliffs, semi-stable soft cliffs and mobile soft cliffs. The western and eastern extremities of the site consist of high chalk cliffs with species-rich calcareous grassland vegetation, the former exposed to maritime influence and the latter comparatively sheltered. At the western end, the site adjoins the Isle of Wight Downs SAC, providing an unusual combination of maritime and chalk grassland. The most exposed chalk cliff tops support important assemblages of nationally rare lichens, including *Fulgensia fulgens*. The longest section is composed of slumping acidic sandstones and neutral clays with an exposed south-westerly aspect. The vegetation communities are a mixture of acidic and mesotrophic grasslands with some scrub and a greater element of maritime species, such as thrift *Armeria maritima*, than is usual on soft cliffs. A small, separate section of the site on clays has a range of successional stages, including woodland, influenced by landslips. These cliffs are minimally affected by sea defence works and together they form one of the longest lengths of naturally-developing soft cliffs on the UK coastline.

The exposure of this coast to high wave energy has allowed the erosion of the cliffs to form sea caves. Examples of this habitat can be found from the Needles along the south-west coast of the Island to Watcombe Bay, and also in Culver Cliff on the south-east coast of the Island. This site also contains the only known location of subtidal chalk caves in the UK. The large intertidal caves in the chalk cliffs are of ecological importance, with many hosting rare algal species, which are restricted to this type of habitat. The fauna of these sea caves includes a range of mollusc species such as limpets *Patella* spp. and the horseshoe worm *Phoronis hippocrepia*.

The southern shore of the Isle of Wight, includes a number of subtidal reefs that extend into the intertidal zone. This site supports a variety of reef types and associated communities, including chalk, limestone and sandstone reefs. To the west and south-west some of the most important subtidal chalk reefs in British waters occur, including the extensive tide-swept reef off the Needles and examples at Culver Cliff and Freshwater Bay. These support a diverse range of species in both the subtidal and intertidal. Other reef habitats within the site include areas of large boulders off the coast around Ventnor. There is a large reef of harder limestone off Bembridge and Whitecliff Bay, where the horizontal and vertical faces and crevices provide a range of habitats. The bedrock is extensively bored by bivalves. Their presence, together with the holes they create, gives shelter to other species, which adds further to habitat diversity. Intertidal pools support a diverse marine life, including a number of rare or unusual

seaweeds, such as the shepherd's purse seaweed *Gracilaria bursa-pastoris*.

**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:

- Reefs
- Submerged or partially submerged sea caves
- Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts

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

Register reference number: UK0030061

Date of registration: 14 June 2005

Signed: *Trevor Salmon*

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