

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

Citation for Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

Name:	South Hams
Unitary Authority/County:	Torbay, Devon
SAC status:	Designated on 1 April 2005
Grid reference:	SX942565
SAC EU code:	UK0012650
Area (ha):	129.53
Component SSSI:	Berry Head to Sharkham Point SSSI, Buckfastleigh Caves SSSI, Bulkamore Iron Mine SSSI, Chudleigh Caves and Woods SSSI, Haytor and Smallacombe Iron Mines SSSI

Site description:

The Devonian limestone headland and cliffs of the Torbay area of south Devon support a large area of the rare sheep's-fescue – carline thistle (*Festuca ovina – Carlina vulgaris*) grassland, including the autumn squill – Portland spurge (*Scilla autumnalis – Euphorbia portlandica*) sub-community, known from no other site in the UK. The site is exceptional in that it supports a number of rare and scarce vascular plants typical of the oceanic southern temperate and Mediterranean-Atlantic elements of the British flora. These include Portland spurge, rock stonecrop *Sedum forsterianum*, autumn squill and small hare's-ear *Bupleurum baldense*. On flatter slopes above the cliffs the grassland gives way to dry heaths characteristic of acid soils. Both heather – spring squill (*Calluna vulgaris – Scilla verna*) and heather – western gorse *Ulex gallii* heaths are represented.

The site includes some of the best examples of semi-natural woodland developed on limestone in Devon. The main block of woodland occupies a steep-sided valley on less steep hillsides to the south-west and north-east, all between 30 and 100 metres altitude. Most of the site is underlain by Devonian limestone, but the woodland at the extreme south-west has developed on base-rich shales. The woodland on the steepest slopes may have originated from a coppice with pollard system, with a high canopy and extensive shrub layer and ground flora.

Trees on the more exposed rock outcrops are stunted. Some mixed woodland has been planted but nevertheless contains a significant proportion of native species and rich ground flora, while other woods have a semi-natural structure. The trees forming the canopy are a mixture of pedunculate oak *Quercus robur*, ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, field maple *Acer campestre*, small-leaved lime *Tilia cordata*, wych elm *Ulmus glabra* and wild cherry *Prunus avium*, with some wild service-tree *Sorbus torminalis*. A wide variety of native shrub species form the understory.

The caves at Buckfastleigh are a good example of cave formation during the Pleistocene period. Abundant in the cave waters is the endemic crustacean *Niphargellus glenniei*, an animal thought to be a pre-glacial relict. The caves at Buckfastleigh, Haytor and Bulkamore Iron Mines also provide an important winter roost site for a large colony of the rare and endangered greater horseshoe bat *Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*, while the buildings at Buckfastleigh support nursery roosts during the summer months.

The buildings and caves at Buckfastleigh Caves, Chudleigh Caves and Woods, and Berry Head to Sharkham Point support the most important hibernation site in southwest England for the bats and this part of the site is also used throughout the year by other bat species,

including lesser horseshoe *R. hipposideros* and natterer's *Myotis nattereri*.

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:

- Caves not open to the public
- European dry heaths
- Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*). (Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone)
- *Tilio-Acerion* forests of slopes, screes and ravines. (Mixed woodland on base-rich soils associated with rocky slopes)*
- Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts

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:

- Greater horseshoe bat *Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*

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: UK0012650
Date of registration: 14 June 2005

Signed: *Trevor Salmon*

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