

SITE NOTIFIED TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE ON 23 JUNE 1987

COUNTY: DURHAM

SITE NAME: PITTINGTON HILL

Status: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981.

Local Planning Authority: CITY OF DURHAM DISTRICT COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: NX 321447

Ordnance Survey Sheets 1:50,000: 88

1:10,000: NZ 34 SW

Area: 6.4 (ha.) 15.8 (ac.)

First Notified: 1987

Description:

Although part of the site has been quarried in the past, Pittington Hill supports one of the most extensive areas of Magnesian Limestone grassland in County Durham, whilst scrub and neutral grassland add to the biological diversity of the site.

Primary Magnesian Limestone grasslands are developed on the slopes of Pittington Hill. Blue moor-grass *Sesleria albicans* occurs here with a wide range of other limestone grassland plants, but unlike certain herbs, notably rock-rose *Helianthemum nummularium*, it is not abundant. It is on the spoil heaps and floor of Pittington Quarry that the most extensive areas of Magnesian Limestone grassland at this site occur, though here they are of secondary origin. Blue moor-grass is plentiful in association with other species characteristic of calcareous soils, such as quaking grass *Briza media*, salad burnet *Sanguisorba minor* and autumn gentian *Gentianella amarella*.

On the slopes of Pittington Hill and on the quarry margins scrub, containing hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, gorse *Ulex europaeus* and a number of rose species, including burnet rose *Rosa pimpinellifolia*, is developed over a ground flora in which woodland herbs such as sanicle *Sanicula europaea*, wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa* and wood sorrel *Oxalis acetosella* are present. Saplings of ash *Fraxinus excelsior* are also becoming established within the scrub.

Locally neutral grasslands have developed, dominated by common bent *Agrostis capillaris* with yarrow *Achillea millefolium* and self heal *Prunella vulgaris*, although on the more heavily grazed and trampled parts of the site neutral grasslands of a more eutrophic character, containing crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens* and ragwort *Senecio jacobaea* are found.

Other Information:

1. Magnesian Limestone is itself restricted to a narrow belt between Nottingham and Durham. The associated semi-natural grasslands are concentrated in South East Tyneside and County Durham, although even here quarrying and agricultural intensification has reduced the original area with the result that good examples of Magnesian Limestone grassland are somewhat scattered and tend to small in area.
2. See also the adjacent High Moorsley SSSI in Tyne and Wear.