

**Habitats and Species of the Silverlake Area:  
A Survey of Sites of Nature Conservation Interest**



*Redbridge SNCI*

**Report Produced for Silverlake Conservation and Community Fund  
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## SUMMARY

- Seven Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) were surveyed within the Parishes covered by the Silverlake Conservation and Community Fund. Three of the sites had not been surveyed since 1993.
- Site surveys included:
  - A list of species
  - Descriptions of habitats
  - Condition Assessment including management advice
  - Mapping of habitats
- 907 individual records of 429 different species were added to Dorset Environmental Records Centre's database
- Two nationally scarce invertebrates were recorded - Ornate Brigadier (*Odontomyia ornata*) and Hairy Sand-wasp (*Podalonia hirsuta*)
- Plants considered Vulnerable within the UK and plants on the Dorset Rare Plant Register (DRPR) were present within the sites. These include Heath Lobelia (*Lobelia urens*) and Heath Dog-violet (*Viola canina*)
- The sites were given the following condition assessments:
  - Owermogine Meadow:** Poor - declining
  - Skippet Heath:** Poor – declining
  - Bartlett's Coppice:** Fair - improving
  - Ower Wood:** Fair - improving
  - Hurst Heath:** Fair/Good - maintained
  - Redbridge:** Fair-declining
  - Sheep's Walk Pit:** Fair-maintained
- Three of the sites are under active management while the other sites appeared largely unmanaged. A lack of grazing has led to a reduction in extent and quality of heathland, fen-meadow and mire habitats.

## INTRODUCTION

SNCIs (Sites of Nature Conservation Interest) are sites with regional or local conservation value, often referred to as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) in other counties. There are 1300 SNCIs within Dorset with the SNCI project having begun in the early 1990s. The Dorset Wildlife Trust (DWT) runs the county's SNCI survey programme with the Dorset Environmental Records Centre (DERC) managing the database of sites, creating citations and providing SNCI information, primarily for conservation work, planning screening and to consultant ecologists in relation to planning proposals.

There are a total of 31 existing SNCIs within the area covered by the Silverlake Conservation and Community Fund. Of these 31 sites, 21 of these had not been surveyed since 2013 or earlier when the funding for this project was applied for in 2022. Six of the SNCIs in the Silverlake area had not been surveyed since the early 1990s.

With Dorset Council having declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency it is important to monitor SNCIs. Survey increases knowledge, provides information on change, allows ecological network mapping to be updated and directs habitat management in order to retain or increase the ecological value of these sites.

This project, funded by the Silverlake Conservation and Community Fund (SCCF), allowed DERC to focus on resurvey of seven SNCIs within the Silverlake area with the aim of recording species and mapping habitats at each site, carrying out a condition assessment and providing landowners with management advice.

## PRE-SURVEY

Mariko Whyte of DWT was tasked with looking into landownership of sites for survey and contacting landowners. Those sites with the longest duration since the previous survey were targeted as a priority. Unfortunately, no response was received to some of the requests, however access to seven sites was obtained. Three of the sites had not been surveyed since 1993. In some cases the site description was very brief and this was a good opportunity to update information on the sites.

Table 1 lists the seven sites that were surveyed, the reasons for their selection as SNCIs and survey dates.

**Table 1** SNCIs surveyed within the Silverlake Conservation & Community Fund Area

Site Code	Site Name	Grid Reference	Site Area (ha)	Year of Previous Survey	Selected Features	2023 Survey Date
SY78/018	Bartlett's Coppice	SY778857	2.58	2013	Habitat: 2.01 ancient woodland site	03/04/2023
SY78/020	Hurst Heath	SY783898	0.79	1993	Species: 3.03 vascular plant species	18/07/2023
SY78/019	Owermoigne Meadow	SY777864	2.89	2010	Habitat: 2.11 fen meadow/rush pasture	28/06/2023
SY78/017	Ower Wood	SY763854	9.54	2013	Habitat: 2.01 ancient woodland site	17/04/2023
SY78/027	Redbridge	SY783886	35.86	1993	Habitat: 2.10 heathland; Species: 3.06 invertebrates	14/06/2023
SY78/026	Sheep's Walk Pit	SY797883	15.4	1993	Species: 3.03 vascular plant species	24/05/2023
SY78/037	Skippet Heath	SY766877	4.39	2010	Habitat: 2.10 heathland	06/07/2023

In addition to the seven sites listed access was obtained at the same time to Marl Pits Wood SNCI (which lies outside the SCCF area) and to half of Mount Skippet SNCI. While the findings from these two surveys are not included within this report, they were also surveyed during 2023 as an offshoot from this work.

## SURVEY WORK

Walkover surveys were conducted at each of the sites during the 2023 survey season by Fiona Wood, in some cases with Bryan Edwards (DERC Ecologist) or Jo Stephen (AWI Project Officer). Plants were recorded, with their frequency, across the site. Where other species such as birds, insects or mammals were observed during the course of the survey these

were also recorded. Habitats were mapped according to the Dorset IHS (Integrated Habitat Mapping) definitions with condition assessments of habitats undertaken using SNCI Compartment Monitoring Forms.

## OUTPUTS

For each of the sites an SNCI report was written including a site summary, habitat descriptions and a list of Dorset Notable species. An aerial map with habitats marked was created for each site. This will be mapped digitally in time and added to the DERC habitat layers. Compartment Monitoring Forms with Condition Assessment of habitats and management advice were included within the packages. Landowners have been signposted to the SCCF for funding to carry out habitat management. Species lists were uploaded onto Living Record, the recording platform used by DERC and the SNCI Project.

All of the reports have been completed and sent to DWT. Some have already been discussed at an SNCI Panel Meeting and sent out to landowners, whilst the remainder will go to the next SNCI Panel Meeting.

## FINDINGS

### Species

In total 907 individual records of 429 different species were made during the survey of the seven SNCIs. Table 2 shows the number of species recorded within different groups.

Table 2 Number of Species Recorded across all seven SNCIs

Vascular Plants	301
Dragonflies, Damselflies	89
Birds	29
Bryophytes	26
Lichens	15
Bees, Wasps, Ants	11
Butterflies	11
Mammals	6
Flies	5
Crickets, Grasshoppers	4
Fungi	3
Beetles	2
Plant Galls	2
Amphibians	1
Bugs	1
Moths	1
Reptiles	1

At Redbridge SNCI Ornate Brigadier (*Odontomyia ornata*), a Nationally Scarce Soldierfly, was recorded. This was found within marginal vegetation around a pond in the west of the site.



Figure 1 Ornate Brigadier (*Odontomyia ornata*), Redbridge – Photo Bryan Edwards



Figure 2 Smooth Cat's-ear (*Hypochaeris glabra*), Sheep's Walk Pit

Of note was a population in excess of 500 plants of Smooth Cat's-ear (*Hypochaeris glabra*) at Sheep's Walk Pit. This plant is on the Dorset Rare Plants Register (DRPR) and listed as Vulnerable on the England Vascular Plant Red List. It had not been recorded previously at the site and tends to be found in the east of the county. Mossy Stonecrop (*Crassula tillaea*) and Heath Dog-Violet (*Viola canina*), both on the DRPR, are also present at Sheep's Walk Pit. The invertebrates Hairy Sand-wasp (*Podalonia hirsuta*), a nationally scarce species, and Green Tiger Beetle (*Cicindela campestris*) are present on the site.

At Hurst Heath, Heath Lobelia (*Lobelia urens*), Vulnerable within England and on the DRPR, continues to do well with over 100 plants present. Habitat management carried out in February 2023 has resulted in bare earth and it is anticipated that the species will spread further.

Clustered Clover (*Trifolium glomeratum*), listed on the DRPR, was recorded within the acid grassland at Redbridge.

### Habitats and Condition Assessment

Given that some of the sites had not been surveyed for 20 years it is not surprising that there has been some change in the habitats within them. It was unfortunately evident that a few of the sites are in desperate need of management to reverse the degradation and loss of priority habitat.

**Owermoigne Meadow** is now largely dominated by Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) in the grassland area with only small areas that can still be described as fen-meadow with species such as Saw-wort (*Serratula tinctoria*), Sharp-flowered Rush (*Juncus acutiflorus*), Fen Bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*), Lesser Skullcap (*Scutellaria minor*), Common Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*) and Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*). There is also scrub encroachment within the grassland. Other habitats include wet and broadleaved woodland, ponds and small pockets of mire, acid grassland and heath. There has been a reduction in the number of Dorset Notable species since the previous surveys. The site is in poor condition and declining in quality. It is essential that grazing is returned to this site which retains high potential. It is hoped that the landowner will take note of the management advice, perhaps applying to the SCCF to enable a return of grazers to the site.



Figure 3 Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*) in mire at Owermoigne Meadow



Figure 4 Marsh St-John's-wort (*Hypericum elodes*) at pond edge, Owermoigne Meadow



Figure 5 Fen-meadow at Owermoigne Meadow



Figure 6 Purple Moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*) dominates much of the grassland at Owermoigne Meadow

**Skippet Heath** has also been given a condition assessment of Poor-declining. Much of the site is coniferous woodland with a Purple Moor-grass ground flora, Rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*) has become locally dominant and Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) locally frequent. The clearing through the centre of the site and into parts of the woodland is now degraded mire with little species interest. Tormentil is locally frequent, while the other Dorset Notable species recorded – Bristle Bent, Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*), Heath Milkwort (*Polygala serpyllifolia*) and Dwarf Gorse (*Ulex minor*) - are all rare. Purple Moor-grass has become dominant over much of the degraded mire. Re-establishing grazing is essential for this site, as well as clearance of Rhododendron. There is a good opportunity for habitat re-creation through felling of the plantation woodland.



Figure 7 Purple Moor-grass dominated degraded mire, Skippet Heath



Figure 8 Royal Fern at Skippet Heath

The broadleaved woodlands of **Bartlett's Coppice** and **Ower Wood** did not appear to have changed dramatically since their previous survey in 2013. There are areas where Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) dominates the understorey. Both sites are undergoing management, Barlett's Coppice through extensive Holly clearance and Ower Wood through coppicing. There are few Dorset Notable species at these sites, although several ancient woodland indicator species were found. These two sites have been given a condition assessment of Fair- improving.



Figure 9 Holly clearance at Barlett's Coppice



Figure 10 Hazel coppice with Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), Ower Wood

The survey of **Hurst Heath** provided an opportunity to update the boundary of the SNCI. The original boundary, created before the advent of widespread GPS technology, was in the wrong place and will be moved westwards to the correct location.



Figure 11 Heath Lobelia, Hurst Heath



Figure 12 Purple Moor-grass dominates much of Hurst Heath

The general quality of the habitat at Hurst Heath is poor, the number of Dorset Notable species recorded has declined from 12 in 1993 to six in 2023. Common Dog-violet (*Viola riviniana*), Tormentil and Lesser Skullcap are the most common notables at the site with others such as Bristle Bent (*Agrostis curtisii*), Flea Sedge (*Carex pulicaris*) and Bog Pimpernel (*Lysimachia tenella*) occasional to rare. Much of the area is heavily dominated by Purple Moor-grass, however, the

specific management for the rare Heath Lobelia is continuing to maintain a good population of this plant. Adding grazing to the site would be of benefit to the wider flora (although impact on Heath Lobelia would need to be monitored), as would reverting the surrounding coniferous forest to acid grassland/heath/mire. This site was assessed as being Fair/Good – maintained. Fair for its habitat, but good for hosting the Heath Lobelia.

At **Redbridge** changes to the SNCI boundary have been recommended, some of the original boundary is now within an active quarry while the pond to the west where the Ornate Brigadier was recorded was not within the original site. While acid grassland with a range of Dorset Notable species such as Buck's-horn Plantain (*Plantago coronopus*), Knotted Clover (*Trifolium striatum*), Trailing Tormentil (*Potentilla anglica*), Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*) and Clustered Clover (*Trifolium glomeratum*) has established on the sand following quarrying, the grassland has been reseeded with Perennial Rye-grass (*Lolium perenne*). The ponds are host to a diversity of species; however, the invasive species New Zealand Pigmyweed (*Crassula helmsii*) and Parrot's-feather (*Myriophyllum aquaticum*) are present. The degraded valley mire has become dominated by Purple Moor-grass with frequent Bog Myrtle. Species previously recorded and appearing to no longer be present include Oblong-leaved Sundew (*Drosera intermedia*), Round-leaved Sundew, Bog Asphodel (*Narthecium ossifragum*), Pale Butterwort (*Pinguicula lusitanica*) and White Beak-sedge (*Rhynchospora alba*). Within the conifer plantation there are small pockets of acid grassland, as well as Rhododendron.

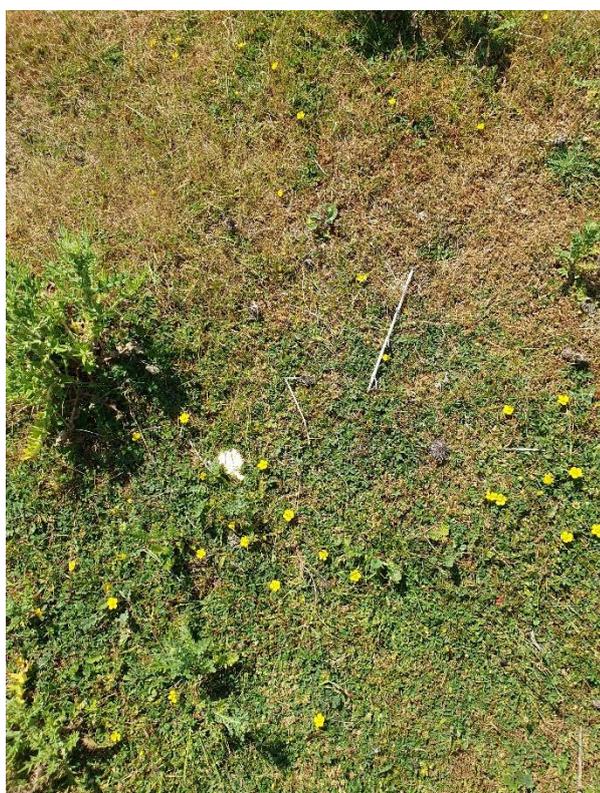


Figure 13 Acid grassland, Redbridge



Figure 14 Acid grassland within conifer plantation, Redbridge

Figure 15 Degraded mire dominated by Purple Moor-grass, Redbridge

The total number of Dorset Notables recorded at Redbridge has risen since previous surveys. However, the presence of invasives and lack of grazing in the degraded mire is a threat to the site. As with other sites grazing is needed and there is potential for habitat creation through felling of conifer plantation. Redbridge has been assessed as being Fair-declining.

At **Sheep's Walk Pit** the heathland for which the site was originally selected has nearly all been lost to scrub. Elsewhere there are large extents of acid grassland, some particularly species rich. Acid grassland Dorset Notables present include Early Hairgrass (*Aira praecox*), Bird's-foot (*Ornithopus perpusillus*), Knotted Clover, Common Stork's-bill (*Erodium cicutarium*) and Buck's-horn Plantain. Amongst the other habitats are areas of rush pasture, exposed areas of bare earth, ponds surrounded by scrub, semi-improved neutral grassland, wet woodland and broadleaved woodland. Rhododendron is present in the woods.

The number of Dorset Notables recorded is high and has risen from 25 in 1993 to 36 in 2023. Less time was dedicated to the original survey, so it is possible that some of the species were missed in 1993. Despite the many species, there are aspects of this site such as the loss of heathland that have led to a condition assessment of Fair-maintained.



Figure 16 Species rich acid grassland, Sheep's Walk Pit



Figure 17 Rush Pasture, Sheep's Walk Pit