**CITATION**

**TWEEDSMUIR HILLS**
**SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST**
Scottish Borders

Site code: 1573

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: NT 165265

OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 72, 73, 78, 79
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 336, 337, 330

AREA: 8,903.67 hectares

**NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES**

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| **Biological** | **:** | **Upland habitats** | **:** | **Upland assemblage** |
| | **:** | **Non-vascular plants** | **:** | **Bryophyte assemblage** |
| | **:** | **Vascular plants** | **:** | **Vascular plant assemblage** |
| | **:** | **Birds** | **:** | **Breeding bird assemblage** |

**DESCRIPTION**

Tweedsmuir Hills Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), located approximately 10km south-east of Biggar at the headwaters of the River Tweed and Megget Water, is a high, rounded range of Silurian hills. The site contains the largest area of montane plateau outside the Highlands and experiences low temperatures, high exposure and late snow lie. These conditions are reflected in the plant and animal communities that occur here, including a nationally important example of an upland habitat assemblage, a nationally important assemblage of breeding birds, a diverse assemblage of bryophytes (mosses and liverworts) and a vascular plant assemblage comprising a number of nationally scarce arctic-alpine species.

The upland habitat assemblage consists of subalpine dry heath; blanket bog; alpine heath; alpine moss heath; springhead, rill and flush; and juniper scrub.

Subalpine dry dwarf shrub heath is well represented across the site. Below the treeline in the Glenheurie, Stanhope and Drumelzier Glens, dry heaths containing an abundance of bearberry *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi* and petty whin *Genista anglica* are found on the drier south-west facing slopes. Bearberry is only known from one other site in south Scotland. On the moister north-east facing slopes, blanket bog rich in bog mosses *Sphagnum* spp., heather and blaeberry occurs. Blanket bog also occupies some of the flat tops of the subsidiary ridges, where it is dominated by hare's-tail cottongrass *Eriophorum vaginatum* and heather with abundant cloudberry *Rubus chamaemorus* at some locations.

Below the main ridge on Glenstivon Dod and other subsidiary summits, alpine heath occurs as dwarfed wind-clipped mats of heather with abundant lichens. Such heaths are unusual south of the Highlands. Blaeberry snow-bed heath, principally a highland community, occurs in the Polmood Corrie and other areas of snow lie, and contains dwarf cornel *Cornus suecica*.

On the summit ridge, alpine heaths dominated by blaeberry and sheep's-fescue *Festuca ovina* and rich in reindeer lichens *Cladonia* spp. are found on the flatter ground. On the more hummocky ground, alpine moss heaths of woolly fringe moss *Racomitrium lanuginosum* and sheep's-fescue dominate. Stiff sedge *Carex bigelowii* is found throughout both of these two communities and dwarf willow *Salix herbacea* sparingly in the latter.

Springs found on the site include both the acid *Philonotis fontana-Saxifraga stellaris* spring and the base-rich *Palustriella commutata-Festuca rubra* spring. A few stands of juniper *Juniperus communis* represent one of the few remaining fragments of juniper scrub in this part of the Southern Uplands.

The most important bryophyte species from a conservation perspective occur in relatively restricted habitats across the site. Many of these species occur in a mixture of base-rich and base-poor flushes, such as the flush complex below Little Craig. These areas support a rich flora of widespread flush species as well as nationally scarce species such as Duval's thread-moss *Bryum weigelii,* and rugged collar-moss *Splachnum vasculosum,* a species that often grows on herbivore dung. Crags and rocks are relatively scarce across the site but support some important species such as the nationally scarce sickle-leaved fork-moss *Kiaeria falcata* and other species that are indicative of calcium-rich rock such as crisped neckera *Neckera crispa* and the nationally scarce Lapland yoke-moss *Amphidium lapponicum*. Additional bryophyte interest on the site includes species that are associated with the restricted western oceanic climate zone (warm, wet winters and cool, wet summers) such as golden-head moss *Breutelia chrysocoma* and the nationally scarce blue pouchwort *Calypogeia azurea*. Talla Linn is the main locality for these species. In total, 15 nationally scarce bryophytes have so far been recorded from the site, although a minority of these have not been seen for some time.

There are relatively few crags within the site due to the nature of the topography. The nationally scarce plants which form the vascular plant assemblage are mainly associated with springhead, rill and flush communities on the slopes below these crags. These include alpine foxtail *Alopecurus borealis*, pale forget-me-not *Myosotis stolonifera*, hairy stonecrop *Sedum villosum* and sheathed sedge *Carex vaginata*. Other plants found here include limestone bedstraw *Galium sterneri*, stone bramble *Rubus saxatilis* and mountain sorrel *Oxyria digyna*.

The site supports one of the most diverse assemblages of upland breeding birds in the Scottish Borders, which includes red grouse, black grouse, golden plover, curlew, dunlin, common snipe, ring ouzel, whinchat, stonechat and wheatear. Several Schedule 1 species also use the site for foraging while breeding off-site, in winter or on passage.

## NOTIFICATION HISTORY

First notified under the 1949 Act: 1971 (as Broad and Dollar Laws SSSI), 1977 and 1978 (both as Tweedsmuir Hills SSSI).

Re-notified under the 1981 Act: 12 August 1988 with a 3818 ha increase in area.

Notification reviewed under the 2004 Act: 10 March 2011

## REMARKS

Measured area of site corrected (from 8,848 ha).