

CITATION

WETHER HILL SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST

Site code: 1622

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: NT 045964

OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 58
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 367

AREA: 95.6 hectares

NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES

Biological:	Bogs:	Blanket bog
	Woodlands:	Upland oak woodland
	Lowland grassland:	Lowland calcareous grassland

DESCRIPTION

Wether Hill Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), comprising the summit of Wether Hill and its northern slopes (Meadowhead and Moreland Hills), lies at the western end of the Cleish Hills, approximately 9.5 km north-west of Dunfermline, Fife.

There is a broad 'terrace' near the summit (335 metres), whilst the steep slopes below are dissected by numerous small valleys with extensive groundwater flushing, the lower sections of which run through wooded dens. These woodlands are semi-natural and of ancient origin, a rare habitat throughout the country and especially in the Dunfermline area. Below the hill summit is a terrace with an area of blanket mire (bog) and small areas of calcareous grassland occur on steep, southwest facing banks. This combination of associated habitat types and topography is unique in the area. Over 200 species of vascular plant occur throughout the site, many of which are locally or nationally scarce.

Ancient semi-natural woodland occupies many of the lower dens. Ash and alder are the principal tree species with much hazel, rowan, birch, wych elm, oak and bird cherry. In those areas less accessible to grazing, a rich woodland flora occurs with herbs such as ramsons *Allium ursinum* and dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, abundant ferns such as lady fern *Athyrium filix-femina* and several locally rare plant species including wood speedwell *Veronica montana* and remote sedge *Carex remota*. Woodland of this type is rare in Fife and Kinross. Semi-natural vegetation including blackthorn scrub and grassland occurs between the blocks of woodland, enhancing their overall value.

The terrace below the hill summit supports an area of blanket mire dominated by hare's-tail cotton grass *Eriophorum vaginatum* and bog mosses (*Sphagnum* spp.). This is one of the few examples of this habitat remaining in the area. Other typical

bog plants present include round-leaved sundew *Drosera rotundifolia* and cranberry *Vaccinium oxycoccos*.

Calcareous sandstone underlies parts of the hillside and has given rise to small areas of calcareous grassland, calcareous flushes and springs. These typically occur on steep, southwest facing banks and have a rich flora. Such habitats are particularly scarce in Fife. Characteristic grassland species include wild thyme *Thymus polytrichus*, glaucous sedge *Carex flacca* and fairy flax *Linum catharticum*.

The following features are not notified but add to the overall diversity of the site. Common sedge *Carex nigra* and soft rush *Juncus effusus* characterise the transition from the edges of the mire to acidic grassland, which covers much of the hillside. Mat grass *Nardus stricta* is dominant on the higher slopes with bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* a frequent associate. Wetter areas are dominated by soft rush and sharp-flowered rush *J.acutiflorus*, with local abundance of flag iris *Iris pseudacorus*, brown sedge *C.disticha* and carnation sedge *C.panicea*. The springs and flushes are rich in bryophytes and hold local rarities including butterwort *Pinguicula vulgaris* and dioiceous sedge *C.dioica*, as well as hairy stonecrop *Sedum villosum* which is scarce in Britain. A rich fauna of Lepidoptera has been recorded; several species of moths occur which have not been found elsewhere in the area, including the clouded silver *Lomographa temerata* which is scarce in Scotland.

NOTIFICATION HISTORY

First notified under the 1981 Act: 21 September 1989

Notification reviewed under the 2004 Act: **14 February 2011**

REMARKS

Measured area of site corrected (from 96 ha).