

COUNTY: LANCASHIRE

SITE NAME: BELL SYKES MEADOWS

DISTRICT: RIBBLE VALLEY

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

Local Planning Authority: Ribble Valley Borough Council

National Grid Reference: SD 718526

Area: 13.68 (ha.) 33.80 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 103

1:10,000: SD 75 SW

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 26 May 1999

Other Information:

1. This is a new site.
2. The site lies within the Forest of Bowland AONB.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Bell Sykes Meadows lies at an altitude of between 140--150m OD, approximately 0.5km north-east of the village of Slaidburn. The site consists of six fields of unimproved, enclosed, herb-rich grassland. The river alluvium of the flatter ground close to the River Hodder supports three fields of herb-rich flood meadow. The field on the higher ground to the east supports herb-rich northern hay meadow, whilst the leached soils overlying carboniferous limestone on the west facing slope supports two fields of herb-rich seasonally grazed pasture. Bell Sykes Meadows is one of the few remaining unimproved herb-rich grasslands present in this part of Lancashire. This vulnerable habitat has become increasingly scarce nationally and has been largely destroyed in Lancashire due to agricultural intensification.

The seasonally-flooded meadows support a herb-rich, neutral grassland community, typical of its type in northern England. This community is characterised by meadow foxtail *Alopecurus pratensis*, Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*, sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, red fescue *Festuca rubra*, soft brome *Bromus hordeaceus* and crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* with greater burnet *Sanguisorba officinalis*, meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, yellow rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, lady's mantle *Alchemilla glabra*, meadow vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis*, eyebright *Euphrasia* agg, smooth hawk's-beard *Crepis capillaris* and pignut *Conopodium majus*. Other species present also include abundant ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, red clover *Trifolium pratense*, meadow buttercup *Ranunculus acris*, daisy *Bellis perennis* and common sorrel *Rumex acetosa*. The diversity of these meadows is further enhanced by the presence of meadow cranesbill *Geranium pratense* and melancholy thistle *Cirsium heterophyllum* along the field edges.

The west facing, sloping ground supports herb-rich meadow and, on the steeper ground, herb-rich pasture. These are characterised by common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, sweet vernal-grass, red fescue, crested dog's-tail and field woodrush *Luzula campestris* with greater burnet, lady's mantle, eyebright, yellow rattle, pignut, common cat's-ear *Hypochoeris radicata*, common bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* and selfheal *Prunella vulgaris*. The pasture on the steeper ground, which supports a mosaic of neutral and acidic grassland, is also characterised by sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina*, tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile* and bitter vetch *Lathyrus montanus*.

A small amount of woodland and scrub is also present on the site.