

Adders at Greenham Common

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Annual knawel



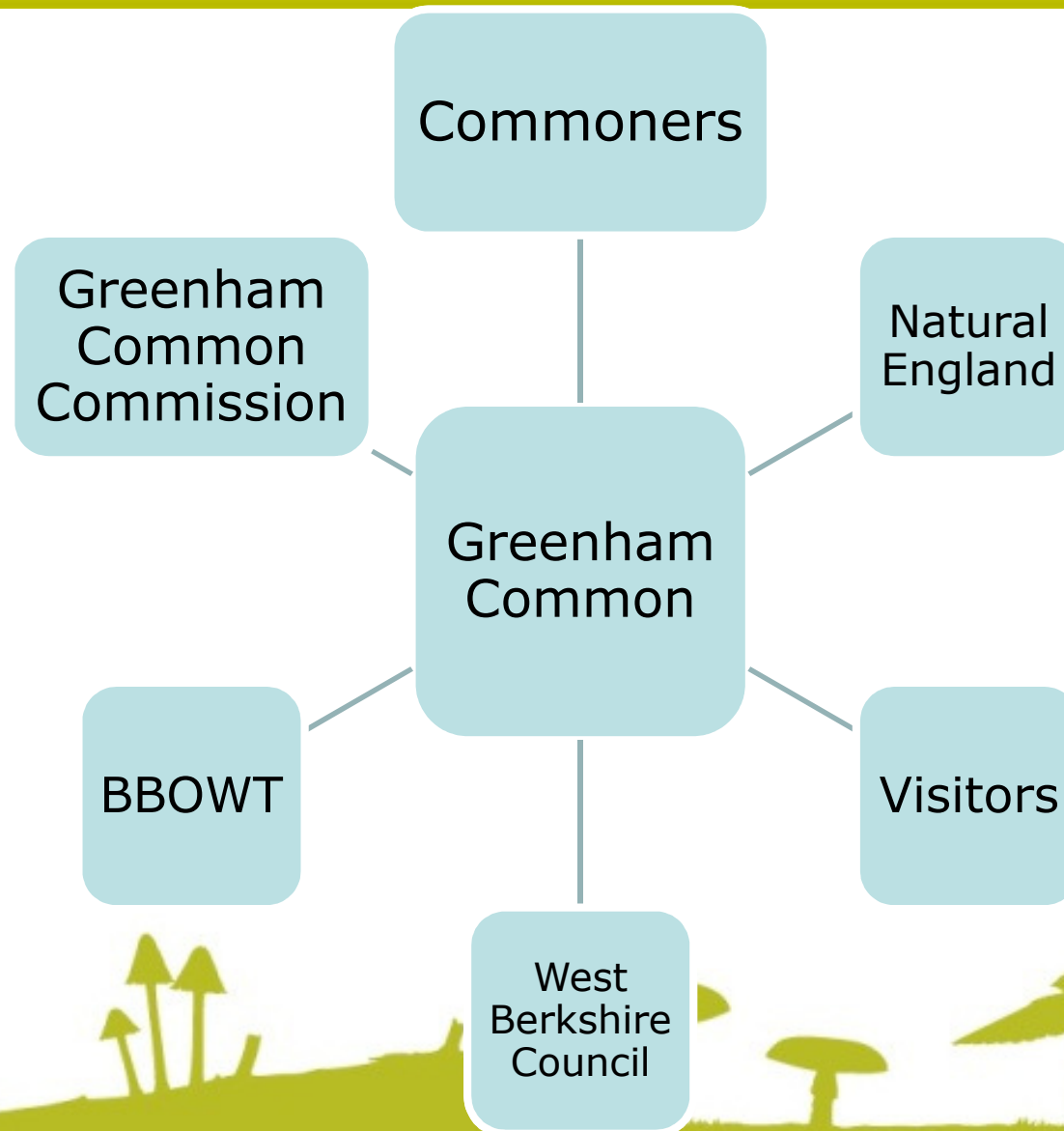


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Dwarf cudweed

Scarce fine-leaved sandwort





COUNTY: BERKSHIRE
 Status: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981
 Local Planning Authorities: Newbury District Council, Berkshire County Council
 National Grid Reference: SU490645 SU523643
 Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 174
 Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985
 I:10,000: SU46 NE/SE, SU56 SW/NW
 Date of Last Revision: 16 March 1994
 Area: 278.61 ha 683.45 ac

Other information: This site includes the former Greenham Common SSSI.

Description and Reasons for Notification

This site comprises of an extensive complex of heathland, grassland, gorse scrub, broad leaved woodland and alder-lined gillies. Much of the heathland and grassland has been maintained by regular mowing within the perimeter of the Greenham Common airbase while the woodland and scrub, predominantly on areas outside the airbase perimeter, has developed with little intervention. The site also includes one large ancient coppice woodland, Peckmoor Copse. The heathland and acid grassland at this site make up the single largest tract of these habitats in Berkshire.

Greenham and Crookham Commons occur on a long ridge between the Rivers Enborne and Kennet. The ridge consists of Eocene deposits of acid, stony clays of the Bagshot Beds overlain by plianist gravels, and topped on heavy impervious clays of the London Clay. Consequently the soils are a complicated pattern of variable depths in which fine draining soils dominate, but with clay pockets producing extensive seepage zones and springs. These springs give rise to streams crossing the small, finished and waterlogged valleys of alder woodland.

The heathland is characterised by a mixture of ling *Calluna vulgaris*, bell heather *Erica cinerea* and dwarf gorse *Ulex minor*, with in some areas, an abundance of heath grass *Dianthus decumbens* and spring sedge *Carex corymbiflora*, a community with a restricted distribution in England. Occasional patches of bare soil support an open acid grassland community with early hair-grass *Aira praecox*, squirrel-tail fescue *Vulpia bromoides* and hair moss *Polytrichum* spp. In some areas mouse-ear-hornleaved *Pilosella officinarum* is particularly abundant. Lichens are a conspicuous feature of the open patches, chiefly *Cladonia* spp., including the nationally scarce *C. caryota*. Dwarf cutwound *Filago minima*, heath cutwound *Grapholium sylvaticum*, bird's-foot *Ornithopus perpusillus*, and annual knaveal *Scleranthus annuus* are frequent within this mosaic together with the nationally scarce fine-leaved sandwort *Mimaria hybrida* and upright chickweed *Moenchia erecta*.

On damper areas the soil is colonised by many locally rare mosses and liverworts including swards of *Archidium alternifolium* and frequent *Lophozia cincta* and *L. bicrenata*. Also present is the nationally scarce liverwort *Riccia sublyrata*, the only known site in Berkshire for this small plant.

In hollows where water accumulates a sedge-type community has developed with sharp flowered rush *Juncus acutiflorus*, carnation sedge *Carex panicea* lower spearwort *Ranunculus flammula* and mosses including *Cladonia dendroidea*. A calcareous influence further increases the diversity, with such plants as wild carrot *Daucus carota*, dwarf thistle *Cirsium acule*, purging flax *Linum catharticum*, pyramidal orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, burnet saxifrage *Pimpinella saxifraga* and the mosses *Trichostomum* and *Encalypta streptocarpa* growing alongside more typically acid-loving plants.

The neutral grassland in the airbase includes locally uncommon plants such as green-winged orchid *Orchis morio*, great burnet *Sanguisorba officinalis*, hare's-foot clover *Trifolium arvense* and meadow saxifrage *Saxifraga granulata*.

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