

One of the largest areas of lowland heath in the country set to receive national protection

A historic moorland landscape in west Cornwall, immortalised in the Poldark novels, has today (7 October) been notified as a Site of Special and Scientific Interest (SSSI) in recognition of its national importance for wildlife.

Penwith Moors is at the most south-western extreme of mainland Britain and offers a unique and extensive mosaic of lowland heath, grassland, acid fen and pockets of woodland. The SSSI will protect an ancient landscape shaped over centuries through the careful stewardship of generations of land managers. The designation will recognise the resulting special features of 59 parcels of semi-natural habitat and farmland spanning over 3,100 hectares, stretching from St Just to St Ives.

The site is home to rare and endangered plants like coral-necklace, pale dog-violet, pillwort and Cornish moneywort which are found amongst the collection of habitats. Rare lichens grow on the outcrops of granite rock, with the song of Dartford warblers drifting across the landscape's heathlands. The area also supports a rich diversity of invertebrates nestled in the heathland.

The site dates back to prehistoric times and has a greater concentration of archaeological and heritage sites than any other comparable area in Western Europe. Standing stones, circles and quoits adorn the landscape alongside more recent mining structures reflecting the Cornwall's illustrious tin, gold and copper mining history.

Wesley Smyth, Area Manager at Natural England said:

An incredible variety of rare plants, insects and birds thrive in the rich tapestry of the Penwith Moors landscape.

This SSSI designation will help protect and restore sites of national importance to wildlife, with farming and nature continuing to co-exist and shape the landscape. We will continue to support farmers and the local people who live, work and visit the Penwith Moors to drive nature recovery and support sustainable uses for this site.

Penwith Moors also has a long history of agriculture and livestock grazing, with many of the 4000 year old field systems still used for their original purpose. Natural England recognises these deep traditions and will continue to work in partnership with local landowners, farmers and the community to promote sustainable farming and nature recovery.

Stunning landscapes such as Penwith Moors are a huge asset for the Cornish economy, drawing in investment from the national and international tourism sectors. Much of the SSSI benefits from public access meaning local communities enjoy access to high quality nature rich spaces for health and well-being as well as the fun and relaxation such spaces inspire.

The decision to notify this area as an SSSI follows extensive assessments by Natural England of its habitats and species, including specially commissioned wildlife experts, which highlighted the importance of the moors for wildlife.

The designation will support landscape scale conservation, to restore habitats in unfavourable condition where wildlife is declining. The protections created by the SSSI designation will prevent damaging activities from taking place, and also promote sustainable land management practices which benefit habitats and species.

Paul St Pierre, Conservation Officer at the RSPB said:

Building on significant public investment through partnerships with landowners and managers, this proposed designation will give important heathland habitats and their unique wildlife, like Dartford warbler the protection they deserve, in one of their largest remaining unprotected areas in southern England, and put this iconic area on the map as a place to invest in nature. This is an action we very much welcome.

The government has laid out its ambitions in the [25 Year Environment Plan](#) for a growing and resilient network of land, water and sea that is richer in plants and wildlife, and has committed to a legal target to halt the decline of nature by 2030 underpinned by the Environment Act.

Following the notification, a four-month period of consultation will open during which anyone may comment on, or object to, the notification. The SSSI designation will then be confirmed, amended or withdrawn within nine months of the notification.

To respond to the consultation, visit: [Penwith Moors SSSI – Defra – Citizen Space](#)

Further information:

- Natural England is the government's adviser for the natural environment in England, helping to protect England's nature and landscapes for people to enjoy and for the services they provide. Natural England is an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.
- A Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is one of the country's very best wildlife and/or geological sites. SSSIs include some of the most spectacular and beautiful habitats: wetlands teeming with wading birds, winding chalk rivers, flower rich meadows, windswept shingle

beaches and remote upland peat bogs, as well as much loved woodlands, meadows, heathlands and wetlands.

- Natural England has a duty under the Wildlife and Countryside Act to designate any area of land which in its opinion is of 'special interest' for its wildlife (flora and fauna), geology or landform
- As of 7 October 2022, the SSSI has been formally notified to landowners and occupiers and other interested parties. There will be a 4-month period in which anyone can make representations or object to the notification. If all objections are resolved or none are submitted, the designation will be confirmed. If there are unresolved objections the Natural England Board will hear all of these; they must then decide whether to confirm the designation (with or without reductions). If the notification is not confirmed within 9 months of the date of notification, the notification falls.
- Once notified, farmers and other land managers must apply to Natural England for consent to carry out certain activities on the land. Natural England may grant consent, with or without conditions, or refuse consent. If refused or conditions are imposed, land managers have a right of appeal.
- The SSSI is close to, and in some locations adjoining, two extant SSSIs: Aire Point to Carrick Du SSSI (598 ha); and Lower Bostraze and Leswidden SSSI (2.28 ha).
- The area in Cornwall forms a core part of the West Penwith NCA and overlaps with parts of the Cornwall Area of Outstanding National Beauty and Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape World Heritage Site.