

# WHITCHURCH DOWN

## 1997-2006: Possible Priority Site of National Importance

### CURRENT STATUS UNCERTAIN

Acidic runnels flowing into fast-flowing river. Presence of Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly, but no records since 1998.

Last updated: 26/03/2025

Site: WHITCHURCH DOWN	1987-1996			1997-2006			2007-2016			2017-2026		
Grid ref.: SX507743	Breeding		Other	Breeding		Other	Breeding		Other	Breeding		Other
	Succ	Poss		Succ	Poss		Succ	Poss		Succ	Poss	
<b><u>Damselflies</u></b>												
Beautiful Demoiselle			B			C						
Banded Demoiselle												
Emerald Damselfly			A									
<b>White-legged Damselfly</b>												
Large Red Damselfly			B	B	+	C						
Blue-tailed Damselfly												
<b>Scarce Blue-t Damselfly</b>			A		+	B						
Common Blue Damselfly												
<b>Southern Damselfly</b>												
Azure Damselfly						A						
<b>Red-eyed Damselfly</b>												
Small Red-eyed Damselfly												
<b>Small Red Damselfly</b>												
<b><u>Dragonflies</u></b>												
<b>Hairy Dragonfly</b>												
Common Hawker												
<b>Norfolk Hawker</b>												
Brown Hawker												
Southern Hawker												
Migrant Hawker												
Emperor Dragonfly						A						
Lesser Emperor												
Vagrant Emperor												
Golden-ringed Dragonfly			B			B						
<b>Downy Emerald</b>												
Broad-bodied Chaser						A						
<b>Scarce Chaser</b>												
Four-spotted Chaser												
Keeled Skimmer	A	B	C		B	D						
Black-tailed Skimmer												
Common Darter	B		+									
Red-veined Darter												
<b>Ruddy Darter</b>												
Black Darter												
Yellow-winged Darter												
Scarlet Darter												
<b>Total species in category:</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>						

**Bold underlined = nationally important species** **Bold black = important species**

Succ = Successful breeding (exuvia(e) and/or larva(e) and/or pre-flight emergent and/or oviposition);

Poss = Possible breeding (copulating pair); Other = Adult(s) or unspecified.

Abundance codes: A=1; B=2-5; C=6-20; D=21-100; E=101-500; F=>500; + = no count.

### **Priority Species History**

**Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly** - noted in July, 1986; one female on 8/8/91; and B in 1995 and 1998, including a pair *in cop*. No records since then, despite searches.

### **Other species of note**

**Keeled Skimmer** - ten recorded in both 1991 and 1995; 45 on 21 June 2005; and 34 on 30 June 2006.

### **Habitat**

A small area of wet, acidic grassland, runnels and a small, but fast-flowing, river subject to Common grazing along a shallow valley. A mosaic of flushes with *Molinia*, *Sphagnum*, *Drosera*, *Carex* species, rushy grass, drier unimproved acidic grassland with bracken, scrub (gorse, *Salix*, etc) and, of most interest to dragonflies, a series of runnels running obliquely from the stream. There are ten major (and some minor) runnels north of the river and two major (and some minor) ones south of the river. Many of these are rather choked with tall rushes, but there are also plentiful areas of shorter vegetation which holds open water in wetter years. These hold *P. polygonifolius*, *H. elodes*, *R. flammula*, *Sphagnum*, *Hydrocotyle*, etc. pH 6.6 (8/8/91); 6.5 and 6.8 (17/7/95). Conductivity 60  $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$  (25/7/95). Some iron ochre. The area is grazed by ponies and sheep, and popular with picnickers. The river has a fast flow and a gravelly to silty base, with pools and shoals. pH 7.0 (8/8/91 and 17/7/95). Conductivity 80  $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$  (25/7/95). Some water moss; trout present. East of the road the area is more overgrown with *Salix* scrub interspersed with short-grazed, flushed patches of *Molinia* through to *P. polygonifolius* and *H. elodes*; north of the river here is rush pasture.

### **Status**

DNP Access land.

### **Area**

4.5 ha

### **Owner/tenant**

Tavistock Town Council; common land.

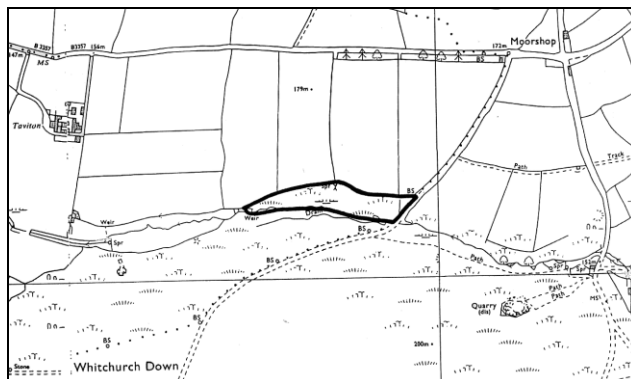
**Local Authority:** Dartmoor NP/West Devon

### **Threats**

- Inappropriate grazing levels: heavy grazing in the 1980s and 1990s, but by 2008 reduced pressure had created a lush sward, such that the runnels were judged unlikely to support Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly.
- Natural succession leading to drying out of runnels.

### **Management suggestions**

- Maintain grazing.
- Prevent scrub encroachment.
- Consider the provision of an interpretation board for visitors.



# Whitchurch Down: 1995 survey map

