



Catherington Down SSSI

Why is Catherington Down Important?

Catherington Down is a *chalk grassland* habitat or *downland*. Over the last 50 years Hampshire has lost 95% of this habitat. Catherington Down is designated as a *Site of Special Interest (SSSI)*. These sites are protected due to their biological or geological features. Catherington Down is also designated a *Local Nature Reserve (LNR)*.

This site was kindly given to Hampshire County Council in 1963 by Captain F.H Long for the express purpose of maintaining its wildlife value for the benefits of future generations. Horndean Parish Council now owns and manages the site and strives to uphold this objective with support from the South Downs National Park.

Wildlife on the Down

Plants and Flowers:

Over 100 different species of flowering plant have been recorded on Catherington Down. These not only comprise of common species, such as lovely displays of *Cowslips* in the spring and blooms of *Marjoram* in the summer, but also very notable species such as *Round Headed Rampion*, a delicate blue flower, or *Clustered Bell Flower*, *Eyebright* and *Salad Burnet*. Woodland flowers include *Bluebell*, *Yellow Archangel*, *Primrose* and the aptly named *Town Hall Clock* or *Moschatel*.

Orchids abound in most natural chalk grasslands and Catherington Down is no exception. *Common Spotted Orchids*, *Bee Orchids*, *Frog Orchids*, *Autumn Lady's Tresses*, *Fragrant Orchid*, *Butterfly Orchid*, *Pyramidal Orchids* have all been found.

Birds:

Whitethroats, *Yellowhammers*, *Linnets*, *Long Tailed Tits* and *Spotted Flycatchers* can all be seen here at different times of the year. The scrub islands and woodlands provide perfect nest and roost habitat. The narrow belt of woodland along the roadside boundary is wonderful for *Great Spotted Woodpeckers* and *Treecreepers*.

Butterflies and insects:

Marbled whites, a common downland species, are frequently seen here. Less common species include *Grizzled Skippers*, *Dark Green Fritillaries* and *Silver Washed Fritillaries*. The rare *Purple Hairstreak* has even been recorded in the lower oak woodland.

Anthills formed by *Yellow Meadow Ants* can grow at the rate of one litre a year. Some can be up to 100 years old. They create a micro habitat allowing low plants such as *Thyme* and *Squinancywort* to thrive.

Strip Lynchets

The terraces that occur on Catherington Down are actually an ancient farming system dating back to the medieval times, known as *Strip Lynchets*. Farmers ploughed across the steep slopes to produce flat ground to work on. These Lynchets would have been present throughout the valley however over the years the majority of them have been ploughed out and removed.



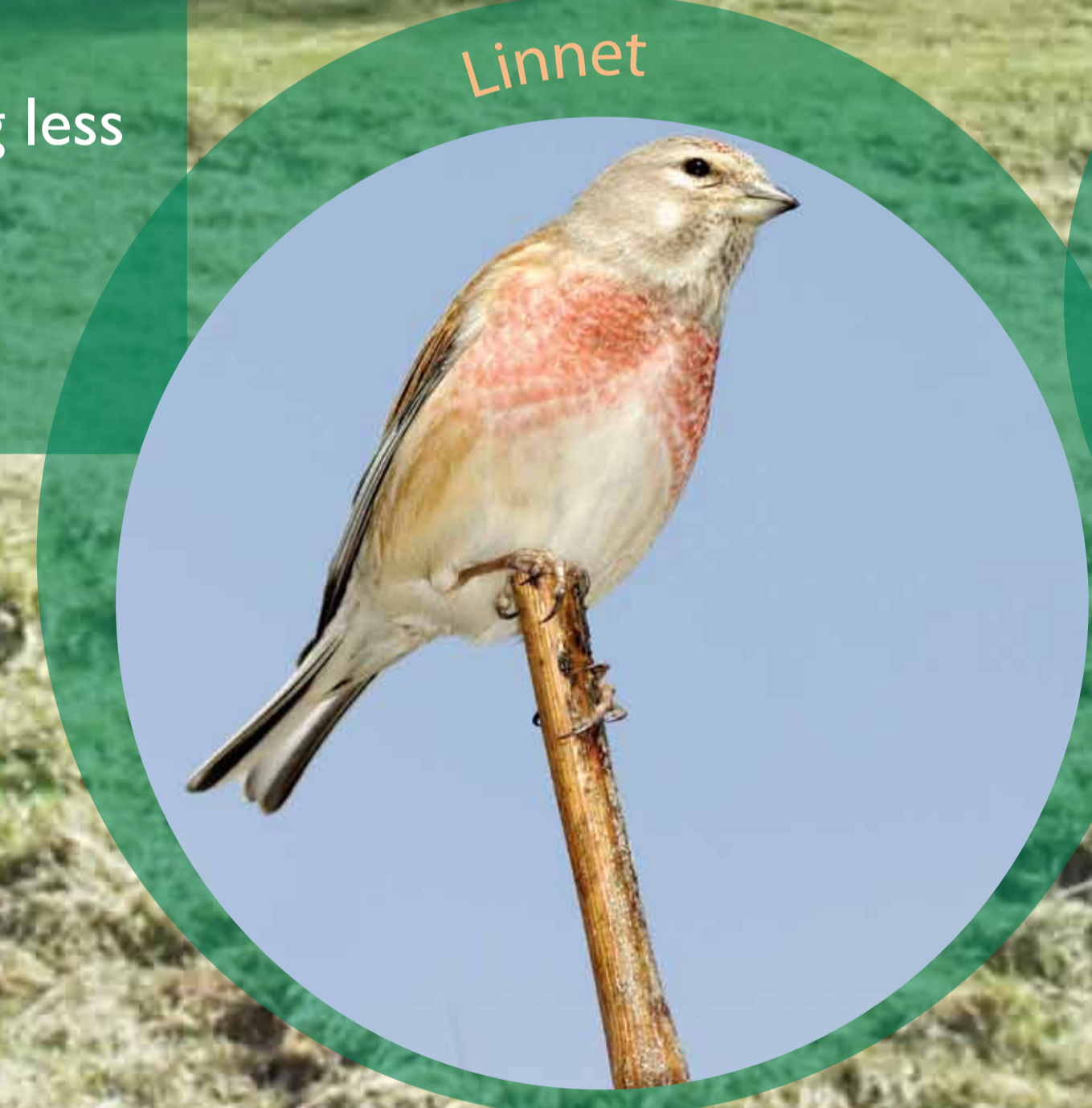
Grizzled Skipper



Yellowhammer

Why do chalk grasslands contain so many different flowers?

Chalk grasslands are characterised by thin soils, with low nutrients, and occur in very *porous rock*. These factors combined mean that species such as *Nettle* or *Docks* are prevented from dominating, allowing less competitive species of plant to thrive. Chalk grasslands contain a rich variety of plant species, which in turn support numerous insect species, like butterflies, that help to pollinate flowers.



Linnet



Marbled White



Autumn Lady's Tresses

Management of Catherington Down

Habitat management is carried out during autumn and winter to minimise disturbance to wildlife. The scrub (Hawthorn, Blackthorn and Bramble) is cut back and removed annually, to prevent it from taking over the whole site. Horndean Parish Council maintains the habitat by grazing it intensively towards the end of each year, typically with cattle, as they cope better with the high number of dogs on the site. These animals remove any extensive growth of grass and keep species like hawthorn and brambles from taking over the open areas. During the summer months wildlife surveys are carried out. These inform us whether our management has been successful.



Round Headed Rampion

What can you do?

Please enjoy the beautiful South Downs and let us know of any interesting wildlife you have spotted.

- Please stick to paths to limit erosion of the rare grassland.
- Please pick up dog faeces to prevent unwanted nutrients from enriching the soil.
- Please keep pets under control, especially when livestock are grazing.

Volunteer! We are always keen for members of the public to become involved. If you want to cut scrub in winter or formally survey wildlife for us, then please contact Horndean Parish Council.



Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust

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