

## WEST SUSSEX SITES OF NATURE CONSERVATION IMPORTANCE

**Site:** Fontwell Park Racecourse, Fontwell

**Grid Ref:** SU 946 068

**Site Ref:** Ar 1

**Owner:** Private

**District:** Arun

**Area:** 14.2 hectares

**Parish:** Aldingbourne

**Habitat:** Calcareous and neutral grassland

**Date:** Identified May 1992      **Author:** Graham Roberts

### Summary

Parts of the grassland around the sides and inside the racetrack of Fontwell Park are managed as hay meadow and have very species-rich swards. The flora includes some notable species, such as Adder's-tongue (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*) and a large population of Green-winged Orchid (*Orchis morio*).

### Site description

The site lies over calcareous alluvium. Most of the grassland is unimproved and species-rich, particularly where mowing is delayed until late in the season.

The area within the track at the south end of the course probably has the richest sward. Of particular interest is a large colony of Green-winged Orchid. The scarce Adder's-tongue is also found here. Ox-eye Daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*), Rough Hawkbit (*Leontodon hispidus*), Common Bird's-foot Trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*) and Bulbous Buttercup (*Ranunculus bulbosus*) are especially abundant.

A range of calcicoles are present throughout most of the unimproved grassland. They include Cowslip (*Primula veris*), Field Scabious (*Knautia arvensis*), Burnet Saxifrage (*Pimpinella saxifraga*), Hedge Bedstraw (*Galium mollugo*) and Downy Oat-grass (*Avenula pubescens*). Mesophytes such as Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), Common Sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*), Common Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*) and Field Wood-rush (*Luzula campestris*) occur in close association with the calcicoles. Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*) tends to be the dominant grass although Common Bent (*Agrostis capillaris*), Cock's-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*) and Smooth Meadow-grass (*Poa pratensis*) are also frequent.

### Management recommendations

Apart from the area mown early in the season, the site is well managed. Treating much of the grassland as hay meadow appears to maintain an attractive and ecologically interesting herb-rich sward.