

**County:** North Yorkshire

**Site Name:** Waterdale

**Status:** Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981.

**Local Planning Authority:** Ryedale District Council

**National Grid Reference:** SE 820617

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:** 100

**1:10,000:** SE 86 SW

**Area:** 36.34 (ha) 90.0 (ac)

**First Notified:** 1954\*, amended 1981\*

**Date of Revision:** 1983

**Description:**

Waterdale is one of the most important chalk grassland sites known in the Yorkshire Wolds, consisting of an east-west main dale and parts of two side dales. It is particularly important as a species-rich site containing a variety of north and south-facing aspects. The grassland types are very varied and include the following:

A tor-grass *Brachypodium pinnatum*/red fescue *Festuca rubra* grassland on south facing slopes, rich in herbs including rock-rose *Helianthemum nummularium*, small scabious *Scabiosa columbaria*, greater knapweed *Centaurea scabiosa* and field scabious *Knautia arvensis*. On deeper soils this community becomes dominated by false oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*.

A red fescue grassland, also with a southerly aspect, which includes the herbs dropwort *Filipendula vulgaris*, rock-rose and wild thyme *Thymus praecox*. A red-fescue grassland with north and north-west aspects, which includes pignut *Conopodium majus* and common milkwort *Polygala vulgaris*, yellow rattle *Rhinanthus minor* and devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, but little rock-rose. Pignut is characteristic of chalk grassland in the Yorkshire Wolds but extremely rare on other chalk site.

A tor-grass sward with a south-eastern aspect and the herbs clustered bellflower *Campanula glomerata* and pepper saxifrage *Silaum silaus*. This latter species is unknown on chalk grassland sites in southern England.

A mixed grassland on north-facing slopes. Grasses included tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa*, sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, red fescue and crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* with the herbs lady's bedstraw *Galium verum* and devil's-bit scabious.

Scrub is developing on some parts of the site and this is usually of hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, but there is also gorse *Ulex europaeus* especially on parts of the south-facing slope.

The dale is noted entomologically for its leafhopper *Heteroptera* fauna including the uncommon *Hardya melanopsis*. The weevil *Coleoptera Sitona lineellus* which has a distinctly northern distribution has also been recorded here.

**Other Information:**

This site is listed in 'A Nature Conservation Review' edited by D A Ratcliffe (1977). Cambridge University Press.

\* Under Section 23 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949.