

COUNTY: KENT            SITE NAME: LARKEY VALLEY WOOD

DISTRICT: CANTERBURY

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

Local Planning Authority: CANTERBURY CITY COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: TR 125553      Area: 42.7 (ha.) 105.6 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 179      1:10,000: TR 15 SW, NW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1951      Date of Last Revision: 1981

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985      Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

The site is managed as a Public Open Space by the Canterbury City Council with advice from the Kent Trust for Nature Conservation.

Reasons for Notification:

Ash-maple coppice is the predominant woodland type on the slopes of this dry chalk valley. This grades into beech high forest on the thin calcareous soils of the upper slopes with hornbeam coppice on the deeper soils in the valley bottom. The varied ground flora includes a number of uncommon plants. The wood also supports many breeding birds.

The ash-maple woodland has a varied coppice layer under pedunculate oak standards. While ash and hazel are the most common coppiced species, field maple, birch, sweet chestnut and wild cherry are also present and hawthorn is a common shrub. In the valley bottom the coppice is more uniform. Hornbeam and hazel are the predominant coppiced species with occasional ash and field maple and a few oak standards. The high forest on the upper slopes is dominated by mature beech with some oak. The shrub layer under the beech is sparse in heavily shaded areas but elsewhere, especially along the woodland edge, there is a variety of species including wild privet, spindle and wayfaring tree; shrubs characteristic of chalk soils.

Much of the coppice has not been cut recently and consequently the ground flora is poor. Bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa* are the most abundant plants. The flora is more varied in the recently cut coppice, and includes wood spurge *Euphorbia amygdaloides* and caper spurge *E. lathyris*. Moschatel *Adoxa moschatellina* and lesser celandine *Ranunculus ficaria* grow in the wetter areas in the valley bottom. Beneath the beech high forest the flora is diverse except where there is heavy shade. Sanicle *Sanicula europaea*, sweet woodruff *Galium odoratum* and wood melick *Melica uniflora* occur with a number of orchids; bird's-nest *Neottia nidus-avis*, fly *Ophrys insectifera* and lady

*Orchis purpurea*. The latter is a scarce species restricted in Britain to Kent and is characteristic of Kentish woods on chalk soils.

A variety of woodland birds breed, including tree pipit, nuthatch, hawfinch and several tits and warblers.