

COUNTY: CAMBRIDGESHIRE **SITE NAME:** BALSAM WOOD

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

Local Planning Authorities: South Cambridgeshire District Council

National Grid Reference: TL 589496

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 154 **1:10,000:** TL 54 NE

Date notified (Under 1949 Act): 1971 **Date of last revision:**

Date notified (Under 1981 Act): 1984 **Date of last revision:**

Area: 34.6 ha 85.7 ac

Other information: A boundary amendment has been made.

Description and Reasons for Notification

Balsam Wood holds woodland community types of ancient origin and of a type geographically restricted to lowland England. The woodland represents one of the few remaining areas of ancient ash-maple woodland on the chalky Boulder Clay and contains a rich assemblage of plants including a population of oxlip *Primula elatior*, a species which is restricted to a few sites in eastern England.

The woodland is dominated by coppice of ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and field maple *Acer campestre* with hazel *Corylus avellana*. Mature oak *Quercus robur* standards are present in parts of the wood. Of particular note is the presence of coppiced hornbeam *Carpinus betulus* which occurs here at the edge of its geographic range in Britain. A good variety of shrubs are present, including dogwood *Cornus sanguinea* and wild privet *Ligustrum vulgare*.

The ground flora is typically rich and of the dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*-bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* type together with such species as herb-Paris *Paris quadrifolia*, early-purple orchid *Orchis mascula* and, of special note, sweet woodruff *Galium odorata*, orpine *Sedum telephium* and wood sanicle *Sanicula europaea*. This is one of very few Cambridgeshire woods where primrose *Primula vulgaris* occurs on the same site as oxlip.

Where open grassy rides occur additional habitat variety is provided and herbs such as bugle *Ajuga reptans* and wood sedge *Carex sylvatica* occur.