

SITE NOTIFIED TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE ON 13 OCTOBER 1986

COUNTY: HEREFORD & WORCESTER SITE NAME: HARTLEBURY COMMON
& HILLDITCH COPPICE

DISTRICT: WYCHAVON SITE REF: 15 WQT

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

Local Planning Authority: HEREFORD & WORCESTER COUNTY COUNCIL,
Wychavon District Council

National Grid Reference: SO 824707 Area: 90.2 (ha.) 222.9 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 138 1:10,000 SO 87 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1955 Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act) : 1986 Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Part registered as common land. Part owned and managed as a Local Nature Reserve by Hereford & Worcester County Council.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Hartlebury Common has been selected as one of the most important areas of dry dwarf shrub heathland surviving in the West Midlands. It lies on wind-blown sand covering two river terraces of the River Severn overlying Bunter and Keuper Sandstone, at Stourport-upon-Severn.

Much of the Common is covered by dry heath dominated by heather *Calluna vulgaris*, bell-heather *Erica cinerea*, and western gorse *Ulex gallii*. Interspersed are areas of bare, disturbed sand and acid grassland dominated by wavy-hairgrass *Deschampsia flexuosa*. Gorse *Ulex europaeus* and broom *Cytisus scoparius* are scattered over the heathland, and in some areas these form continuous scrub in which silver birch *Betula pendula*, pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* and hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* occur. This is the most extensive example of dry heath in Worcestershire and supports several heathland or sand-loving plants which are very scarce in the county. These include heath dog-violet *Viola canina*, tower mustard *Arabis glabra*, bur chervil *Anthriscus caucalis* and small cudweed *Filago minima*. There are also species which are unknown elsewhere in the county, such as flixweed *Descurainia sophia*, spring vetch *Vicia lathyroides* and sand catchfly *Silene conica*. This last is normally found in sandy habitats in the south and east of England.

The site is particularly important because it includes Worcestershire's only example of a species-rich valley mire, which has developed over thick peat in a linear depression on the lower river terrace. The mire is dominated by mosses *Sphagnum* and *Polytrichum* spp. with tussocks of common cotton-grass *Eriophorum angustifolium*, purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix* and cranberry *Vaccinium oxycoccos* at its only Worcestershire station. Also present are marsh cinquefoil *Potentilla palustris*, marsh violet *Viola palustris* and round-leaved sundew *Drosera rotundifolia* here at its only known location in the county. Small areas of open water support bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*, broad-leaved pondweed *Potamogeton natans* and bog pondweed *P. polygonifolius*.

All three British newts occur at this site.

Several components of the invertebrate fauna of Hartlebury Common have been well recorded. Recent studies of the lepidoptera suggest that it is an important county site with

several locally or regionally scarce species present such as the crescent *Celaena leucostigma*, beautiful yellow underwing *Anarta myrtilli*, heath rustic *Xestia agathina*, dotted border wave *Idaea sylvestraria* fox moth *Mascrothylacia rubi* and emperor moth *Saturnia pavonia*.

Hartlebury Common has been subject to a number of scientific papers. A recent palynological (spore) study based on peat samples from the valley mire describes changes in the site's vegetational history.

Hildditch Coppice is an eastern extension of Hartlebury Common. It is an example of base-rich spring-line alder *Alnus glutinosa* woodland which has developed in a damp hollow beside the Hartlebury Brook. Crack willow *Salix fragilis* is common amongst the alder and hazel *Corylus avellana* and grey sallow *Salix cinerea* are present in the shrub layer. The ground flora is mostly dominated by greater pond-sedge *Carex riparia* with stinging nettle *Urtica dioica*, common reed *Phragmites australis* and creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens*. Other characteristic plants present include opposite-leaved golden-saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*, meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, water horsetail *Equisetum fluviatile* and greater tussock-sedge *Carex paniculata*.

Adjacent to the alder woodland is a pool fringed with mixed fen. On the drier slopes above the Brook, there is broad-leaved woodland where fly honeysuckle *Lonicera xylosteum* has recently been found.