

COUNTY: KENT      SITE NAME: MAGPIE BOTTOM

DISTRICT: SEVENOAKS

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

Local Planning Authority: Sevenoaks District Council

National Grid Reference: TQ 544610 Area: 113.9 (ha.) 281.4 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 188      1:10,000: TQ 56 SE (SE)

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1987      Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Description:

The principal interest of this site is the chalk grassland on the steep slopes which supports a herb-rich plant community, including the nationally rare Kentish milkwort *Polygala amarella*. The site also incorporates neutral grassland, scrub and a variety of woodland.

Sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina* and upright brome *Bromus erectus* dominate the species-rich grassland areas. Associated herbs include characteristic downland plants such as dwarf thistle *Cirsium acaule*, common rockrose *Helianthemum nummularium*, squinancywort *Asperula cynanchica* and horseshoe vetch *Hippocrepis comosa*. Seven orchid species occur in the grassland, particularly in the northern part of the site, among them the scarce man orchid *Aceras anthropophorum*. The Kentish milkwort is present in small numbers, in areas of more open turf. Where the slopes are less steep, fewer species generally occur and some of the grassland has become rank, dominated by upright brome and cock's foot *Dactylis glomerata*. The deeper soils of the valley floor support neutral grassland.

Woodland is scattered throughout the site, but is most frequent on the plateau over the Clay-with-Flints. Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, oak *Quercus robur* and beech *Fagus sylvatica* are the most common standard trees with ash and hazel *Corylus avellana* widespread in the coppice layer. Other tree and shrub species, such as wild cherry *Prunus avium*, field maple *Acer campestre* and hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, are also present. The ground flora on the upper slopes is bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* dominated, with bramble *Rubus fruticosus* and occasionally bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*. Dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* predominates on the thinner soils of the steeper slopes. In addition, a number of species indicative of ancient woodland occur, including midland hawthorn *C. laevigata* on the clay soils and spurge laurel *Daphne laureola* on the more chalky soils. Lower Wood contains a narrow chalky bank with mature beech and yew *Taxus baccata* and here the ground flora, though sparse, includes the saprophytes yellow bird's-nest *Monotropa hypopitys* and bird's-nest orchid *Neottia nidus-avis*; these plants derive their nourishment from decaying organic matter. Both species are scarce in Kent.

Scrub is present in former woodland clearings and has also developed along hedge-lines and wood edges as well as in some of the ranker grassland. Hawthorn is generally the dominant species although bramble, traveller's joy *Clematis vitalba* and roses *Rosa* spp. are abundant in places. Lime-loving species, such as whitebeam *Sorbus aria* and privet *Ligustrum vulgare* are also frequent.

The fauna of this site is not well known. However, two locally distributed butterflies are found here, viz the chalkhill blue *Lysandra coridon* and the brown argus *Aricia agestis*.