

COUNTY: KENT SITE NAME: OLDBURY AND SEAL CHART

DISTRICTS: TONBRIDGE AND MALLING; SEVENOAKS

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

Local Planning Authorities: Tonbridge and Malling District Council,
Sevenoaks District Council

National Grid Reference: TQ 571558 Area: 173.93 (ha.) 429.77 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 188 1:10,000: TQ 188

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1990

Other Information:

The site lies within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Part of the site is owned by the National Trust. The boundary has been amended at renotification by several extensions and deletions.

Description:

This site lies on the Lower Greensand ridge to the east of Sevenoaks. It contains acidic sessile oak woodland of ancient origin, more typical of northern and western Britain, together with relict heathland communities and more recently-derived secondary woodland. An outstanding assemblage of fungi is present, numbering over 250 species and including several that are rare* or scarce** in Britain. Characteristic communities of invertebrates and bryophytes (mosses and liverworts) also occur.

Most of the woodland on the Lower Greensand in Kent is of recent secondary origin, often having developed over former heathland. The fact that much of the woodland on this site is ancient makes it of particular interest. The composition of the woodland varies considerably: towards the north and east of the site sessile oak *Quercus petraea* coppice is widespread with beech *Fagus sylvatica* and sessile oak standards. Other tree species found here include birch *Betula sp*, rowan *Sorbus aucuparia*, whitebeam *S. aria* and aspen *Populus tremula*. Towards the south and east the woodland is more open with much birch, sessile oak and Scots pine *Pinus sylvestris*. Further west, on the flatter ground, sessile oak and silver birch *B. pendula* predominate as both mature trees and coppice whilst beech is more frequent on the steeper ground. Coppiced sweet chestnut *Castanea sativa* is scattered throughout the site as are shrub and scrub species such as hazel *Corylus avellana*, holly *Ilex aquifolium* and gorse *Ulex europaeus*.

The ground flora reflects the acidic nature of the soils: bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* is often dominant in the north of the site, whilst bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* is abundant to the south-east. Other species widespread on the site include ling *Calluna vulgaris*, wavy-hair grass *Deschampsia flexuosa* and heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile*. Two other plants found are heath dog-violet *Viola canina* which is rare* in Kent and climbing corydalis *Corydalis claviculata* which is scarce** in Kent. The latter was first recorded here after the 1987 storm growing on the acidic sandy soils exposed by fallen trees.

The woodland supports an outstanding assemblage of lower plants, particularly fungi with over 250 recorded species including 10 species which are regarded as rare or scarce in Britain. Of these two are considered to be species predominantly of the Scottish Highlands: *Collybia distorta* and *Suillus fluryi*. Of the mosses found on the site many are associated with the outcrops of Oldbury stone, a hard siliceous sandstone. Species of interest include a sandrock speciality *Calypogeia integristipula*, a species associated more with Western Britain *Scaparia umbrosa* and the rare *Lophocia ventineosa var confertifolia*.

The combination of ancient woodland, heathy vegetation and sandy soils supports a characteristic range of invertebrates. Amongst the bees and wasps recorded is a colony of the solitary bee *Andrena lapponica* found here at the only locality known for this species in Kent. It is considered to be a northern species and forages particularly on bilberry blossom. Many of the invertebrates are restricted to ancient woodland sites including two species of mollusc: the slug *Limax tenellus* is scarce in Britain and the snail *Phenacolumax major* is rare and confined to southern England and South Wales.

The site also supports many woodland birds including redstart found here at one of its few Kent sites.

* rare: in Kent: recorded from 1% or fewer of the 2 x 2km squares in Kent.

in Britain: recorded from 15 or fewer of the 10 x 10km squares in Britain.

** scarce: in Kent: recorded from 1--5% 2 x 2km squares in Kent.
in Britain: recorded from 15--100 10 x 10km squares in Britain.