

COUNTY: KENT

SITE NAME: ONE TREE HILL AND  
BITCHET COMMON

DISTRICTS: TONBRIDGE AND MAILING; SEVENOAKS

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

Local Planning Authority: Tonbridge & Malling District Council;  
Sevenoaks District Council

National Grid Reference: TQ 570535                      Area: 76.11 (ha.) 188.06 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 188                      1:10,000: TQ 55 SE

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1990                      Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

This site lies within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Part of the site is owned by the National Trust.

Reasons for Notification:

Situated to the south-east of Sevenoaks, this site comprises an extensive area of woodland of varied composition on the Lower Greensand. Some plants and invertebrates of restricted distribution are present, including the slug *Tandonia rustica* at its only known British locality.

On the plateau, in the north of the site, the Lower Greensand is overlain by angular chert drift giving rise to acidic soils. To the south there is a steep scarp slope where the exposed ragstone (a calcareous sandstone) has resulted in contrasting soils of more base-rich status. These varying soil types are reflected in the woodland composition. Much of the woodland is believed to be of ancient origin, though there are also areas of more recent and open secondary woodland.

Bitchet Common has acidic soils supporting mixed woodland: sessile oak *Quercus petraea* and beech *Fagus sylvatica* predominate together with coppice of birch *Betula* sp. and some sweet chestnut *Castanea sativa*. Other tree and shrub species present include hazel *Corylus avellana*, holly *Ilex aquifolium*, yew *Taxus baccata*, whitebeam *Sorbus aria* and rowan *S. aucuparia*. The ground flora is dominated by bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg. whilst other species such as heather *Calluna vulgaris*, bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* and heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile* are also frequent. The plateau of One Tree Hill supports a similar vegetation, though here there is also dense scrub principally of hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* and elder *Sambucus nigra*. The top of Shingle Wood, and the upper slopes of Broadhoath, Wet Bank and Martins Woods are also on similar soils to Bitchet Common. More mature trees are present in these areas and bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* is locally dominant in the ground flora.

The valley of Martins Wood contains damp, more base-rich soils. Coppiced ash *Fraxinus excelsior* often predominates here though there is also much hazel, field maple *Acer campestre* and alder *Alnus glutinosa*. Some large pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* standards occur. Bramble

and bluebell are dominant in the ground flora of the drier areas whilst in the wettest parts they are replaced by species such as opposite-leave golden-saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*, pendulous sedge *Carex pendula* and great horsetail *Equisetum telmateia*.

The ragstone escarpment supports woodland of varied composition. There is much neglected coppice of ash and hazel together with some mature beech. Mature wych elm *Ulmus glabra* was formerly quite frequent but many specimens have been killed by Dutch Elm Disease. A range of species characteristic of relatively base-rich soils is found amongst the ground flora: this includes dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, early-purple orchid *Orchis mascula* and green hellebore *Helleborus viridis*, the latter species being scarce in Kent\*. Bryophytes (mosses and liverworts) are frequent, including a liverwort with a predominantly western distribution, *Porella arboris-vitae* -- found here at its only known locality in Kent. The escarpment is extremely steep in places and minor landslip are not infrequent. Such events open up the woodland and thus there are some areas containing dense scrub or ruderal vegetation.

Although the invertebrate fauna has not been extensively investigated, the ragstone escarpment in particular is known to support a variety of species of interest. The large and distinctive slug *Tandonia rustica* was discovered here, for the first time in Britain, in 1986. Also present are two nationally scarce\*\* snails, the point snail *Acicula fusca* and Rolph's door snail *Macrogastra rolphii*, both of which are typically found in ancient woodland. This is also the only known Kent site for the bristletail *Dilta hibernica*.

\* Scarce in Kent: recorded from between 1 and 5% of the 2km x 2km tetrads in Kent.

\*\* Nationally scarce: recorded from between 16 and 100 10km x 10km squares in Britain.