

**COUNTY:** Oxfordshire/Buckinghamshire **SITE NAME:** Aston Rowant Woods

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

**Local Planning Authorities:** South Oxfordshire District Council, Wycombe District Council

**National Grid Reference:** SU750984

**Ordnance Survey Sheet:** 1:50,000 165 **1:10,000:** SU79 NW, SU79 NE

**Date Notified (Under 1949 Act):** 1972 **Date of Last Revision:** 1977

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

**Area:** 209.7 HA 518 ac

**Other Information:** Boundary revised in 1975. Aston Rowant Woods was formerly included within the Aston Rowant SSSI

### Description and Reasons for Notification

The Aston Rowant Woods complex is of national importance as a large, unfragmented area of ancient semi-natural woodland characteristic of the Chilterns scarp.

The site consists of a series of contiguous areas of woodland on the chalk escarpment, plateau and dip slope of the Chilterns. Much of this site is ancient woodland and although parts have been modified by the planting of introduced trees and by sycamore invasion, a unusually wide range of semi-natural woodland stand types occur, dominated by oak and beech. The rich flora includes no fewer than 52 species indicative of old woods. Over a hundred species of fungi are recorded. Paths, rides and glades are numerous, and the presence of boggy hollows and standing and fallen dead timber provide diverse niches for invertebrates.

**Grove Wood** is an escarpment woodland dominated by vigorous, even-beeched high forest with some low sycamore-ash and tall ash-wych elm coppice. Goat willow *Salix caprea* is common in wet sites, but the shrub layer is otherwise not prominent and in some places lacking altogether. Below gaps in the canopy the field layer is dominated by dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*. Upper Grove Wood lies on the clay-with-flints plateau and is dominated by oak with frequent ash and beech and, notably, some coppiced small-leaved lime. The well developed field layer includes uncommon species such as herb Paris *Paris quadrifolia* and green hellebore *Helleborus viridis*.

**Aston Wood** forms a curving block on the plateau and north-west facing escarpment. About two-thirds consists of even-aged beech high forest which is younger than that of Grove Wood, but a number of other trees share the canopy, especially ash and gean, but also oak, whitebeam, sycamore and hornbeam. Holly, hawthorn and elder form a sparse understorey with rowan and hazel coppice stools at the eastern end. The eastern third of Aston Wood is dominated by ash with oak and beech, the boundary bank being marked by three large stools of small-leaved lime.

**Juniper Bank** contains particularly diverse woodland including beech-ash high forest derived from neglected coppice, and stands of alder and field maple. One steep bank consists of mixed scrub and chalk grassland.

**Kingston Wood** is mainly beech high forest on acidic clay-with-flints soils, containing frequent oak and occasional ash standards. Regeneration of beech, ash, bird cherry, willow and sycamore is taking place in the gaps. The scarp slope of Kingston Wood consists of an almost unbroken canopy of beech, as does **Crowellhill Wood**, some of whose beech is derived from coppice. The shrub and field

layers are poorly developed in the heavily shaded conditions, although several notable species occur, including fly orchid *Ophrys insectifera*, violet helleborine *Epipactis purpurata*, narrow-lipped helleborine *E. leptochila* and the rare lesser hairy brome-grass *Bromus benekenii*.

**High Wood and Crowell Wood** are situated on the dip slope and lie on a mixture of clay and chalk. Dense beech forest dominates both woods, with only occasional oak, ash and wild cherry. A sparse understorey of holly and elder is present in some places. The canopy is more open on the steeper chalk slopes where there is a diverse shrub layer, and a field layer dominated by dog's mercury and including wood barley *Hordelymus europaeus* and spurge laurel *Daphne laureola*.