

Notification Date: 7 September 1990

COUNTY: HEREFORD & WORCESTER      SITE NAME: EASTNOR PARK

DISTRICT: MALVERN HILLS      SITE REF: 15 WE8

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, Malvern Hills District Council

National Grid Reference: SO 745378      Area: 147.5 (ha.) 364.5 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 150      1:10,000: SO 73 NE, NW

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

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

Other Information:

New site. Within the Malvern Hills AONB.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Eastnor Park is situated on the southern and western flanks of the Malvern Hills in eastern Herefordshire. The Park was enclosed in the fifteenth century and it is highly probable that much of its native tree content is derived from the original forest cover of Malvern Chase which dates back to Norman times.

The site has a varied topography, with steep slopes rising to 240 m on the eastern side and more gentle slopes in the vicinity of the Glynche Valley. The underlying geology is quite complex with Silurian shales, limestones and siltstones on the western slopes, Llandovery or May Hill sandstones in the centre and Precambrian rocks in the east. The soils range from alkaline through neutral to slightly acidic.

The Park is a large, diverse example of wood pasture, a habitat which has been much reduced in extent over the centuries. In addition, there are important communities of invertebrates.

The parkland trees are predominantly sessile oak *Quercus petraea* with a wide variety of other species such as horse-chestnut *Aesculus hippocastanum*, ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, beech *Fagus sylvatica*, field maple *Acer campestre* and wild service-tree *Sorbus torminalis*. A specimen of the latter species is one of the largest known in Britain. Mistletoe *Viscum album* is particularly abundant in the Park and occurs on at least seven different host species.

Ashen Fields coppice is an area of ancient semi-natural woodland dominated by sessile oak. Other tree species include silver birch *Betula pendula*, field maple, yew *Taxus baccata* and pedunculate oak *Quercus robur*. The shrub layer is very sparse with only a few scattered hawthorns *Crataegus monogyna*. The ground flora is dominated by bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* associated with bramble *Rubus fruticosus* and Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus*.

The diversity of the site is enhanced by a number of wet flushes dominated by hard rush *Juncus inflexus* and soft rush *J. effusus* with a variety of herbs including lesser spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*, marsh thistle *Cirsium palustre*, greater bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus uliginosus* and brooklime *Veronica beccabunga*.

The western ridge of the Park supports limestone grassland with typical lime-loving species such as common rock-rose *Helianthemum nummularium*, wild thyme *Thymus drucei*, woolly thistle *Cirsium eriophorum*, carline thistle *Carlina vulgaris* and dwarf thistle *Cirsium acaule*.

The Park has a rich invertebrate fauna and is a stronghold for the nationally rare high brown fritillary butterfly *Argynnis adippe* whose larvae feed on violets *Viola* spp. which are abundant here. A national survey of the remaining populations of this butterfly has identified the Eastnor colony as being one of the strongest in Britain. The site also supports several nationally scarce Lepidoptera (butterflies and moths) such as pearl-bordered fritillary *Boloria euphrosyne*, oak tree pug *Eupithecia dodoneata*, pale pinion *Lithophane socia* and alder kitten *Furcula bicuspis*. Two nationally rare beetles are known from the site, *Biplorus minutus* and *Agrilus sinatus*. The latter species occurs mainly in the south-east of England and is dependent on hawthorn which is plentiful in the Park. In addition there are two nationally scarce Diptera (flies), the hoverfly *Volucella inflata* and the soldier fly *Oxycera rara*.

The Park is also important for birds, particularly woodland species such as sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*, woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*, hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* and lesser spotted woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*. Raven *Corvus corax* also occur here at the eastern edge of their distribution in south-western Britain. Curlew *Numenius arquata* and lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* breed in the open grassland areas. In addition to the herd of 300 red deer *Cervus elaphus* the mammals include polecat *Putorius putorius* which has colonised the area from the Welsh Borders to the west.