

COUNTY: KENT **SITE NAME:** SCORDS WOOD AND BROCKHOULT MOUNT

DISTRICT: SEVENOAKS

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

Local Planning Authorities: Sevenoaks District

National Grid Reference: TQ(51) 482520 **Area:** 245.0 (ha.) 605.4 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 188 **1:10,000:** TQ 45 SE, SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1963 **Date of Last Revision:** 1981

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1991

Other Information:

Parts of the site are listed in 'A Nature Conservation Review'*1.

Reasons for Notification:

This site includes areas of agriculturally unimproved pastures, woodlands and small areas of heath.

The site forms part of the Lower Greensand escarpment which runs through north Kent. Consequently soils within the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) vary greatly depending upon the underlying geology. Soils forming on the greensand and head deposits tend to be acidic and well-drained; the outcrops of Kentish Rag lead to more calcareous soils and those on the Wealden Clay are poorly-drained and seasonally waterlogged.

Much of the Chart was traditionally managed as wood-pasture until the mid-nineteenth century when it was enclosed through Act of Parliament. After the lifting of the grazing pressure the beech pollards and adjacent woodlands seeded into the open areas, and were managed as coppice for charcoal burning.

The site now contains the best examples of sessile oak *Quercus petraea* stands in Kent. The shrubs on the plateau are dominated by beech *Fagus sylvatica*, sessile oak, pedunculate oak *Quercus robur*, birches *Betula* species, whitebeam *sorbus aria* and rowan *Sorbus acuparia*. Thuringian whitebeam *Sorbus aria x aucuparia*, a hybrid between rowan and whitebeam, is found here on one of only four sites in Kent. The ground flora is dominated by bramble *Rubus fruticosus* and bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* where the canopy has been opened by the 'Great Storm' of 1987. Elsewhere, where there is a dense canopy, it is sparse and includes bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*, wavy hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa*, heather *Calluna vulgaris*. A holly *Ilex aquifolium* understorey is present in places.

Away from the plateau, pedunculate oak replaces sessile oak in the canopy and bramble, wood sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*, honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum* and wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa* dominate the ground flora. Moving down the escarpment edge, species which require some lime such as ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, field maple *Acer campestre*, cherry *Prunus avium*, downy birch *Betula pubescens* and hazel *Corylus avellana* appear in the canopy and bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* and yellow archangel *Lamiastrum galeobdolon* in the ground flora.

The wetter, more nutrient-rich soils and springs in the woods on the Wealden Clay at the foot of the escarpment support woodlands dominated by oak species, beech, ash, field maple, alder *Alnus glutinosa*, aspen *Populus tremula* and guelder rose *Viburnum opulus*.

The ground flora includes wood poa grass *Poa nemoralis*, bugle *Ajuga reptans*, stinging nettle *Urtica dioica*, sweet woodruff *Galium odoratum*, enchanter's nightshade *Circaea lutetianna*, dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, town-hall clock *Adoxa moschatellina*, and thin-spiked wood-sedge *Carex strigosa*.

Grasslands on the acidic plateau soils are dominated by common bent-grass *Agrostis capillaris*, heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile*, sheep's sorrel *Rumex acetosella*, often with heather *Calluna vulgaris* and bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*. A pasture just south of Emmetts House has more neutral soils with wet flushes. Here the sward is dominated by common bent-grass, sheep's fescue grass *Festuca ovina*, cock's-foot grass *Dactylis glomerata* and meadow foxtail *Allopecurus pratensis*; other plants include devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, black knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, glaucous sedge *Carex flacca*, zig-zag clover *Trifolium medium* and common spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza fuschii*.

The number of plants scarce in Kent*² have been recorded from this site. These include lily-of-the-valley *Convallaria majalis*, common wintergreen *Pyrola minor*, lemon-scented *Oreopteris limbosperma* and green hellebore *Helleborus viridus*.

A 'Nature Conservation Review': edited by D A Ratcliffe. Cambridge University Press.