

COUNTY: KENT            SITE NAME: WESTERHAM WOOD

DISTRICT: SEVENOAKS

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

Local Planning Authority: SEVENOAKS DISTRICT COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: TQ 439550    Area: 44.0 (ha.) 108.7 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 187    1:10,000: TQ 45 SW, NW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1968    Date of Last Revision: 1978

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

Other Information:

Reasons for Notification:

This site is an example of one of the few remaining ancient woodlands on Gault Clay in Kent. The wood has a rich ground flora and an outstanding breeding bird community.

Westerham Wood is composed largely of oak *Quercus robur* maidens with hazel *Corylus avellana* and ash *Fraxinus excelsior* coppice. A range of other native trees and shrubs is present, including hornbeam *Carpinus betulus*, field maple *Acer campestre* and spindle *Euonymus europaeus*. Traditional coppice-with-standards management can be traced back to the late eighteenth century and was continued until earlier this century when large amounts of timber were removed. Little management ensued up until the 1970s, when some coppicing was reinstated and a number of blocks were planted with conifers.

Downwash from the Chalk and Upper Greensand has given rise to clays and sandy loams overlying much of the Gault Clay. The resultant variation in soil acidity and moisture content coupled with traditional management on a long-established woodland site, is reflected in the diverse ground flora. Bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* are most abundant, but 34 plant species indicative of ancient woodland also occur, including herb paris *Paris quadrifolia*, wood spurge *Euphorbia amygdaloides* and green hellebore *Helleborus viridis*. Plants characteristic of wet woodland are an important feature, especially of the rides. 12 sedge *Carex* spp. have been recorded, including thin-spiked wood-sedge *C. strigosa* and pale sedge *C. pallescens* both of which are uncommon in Kent; common valerian *Valeriana officinalis* and opposite-leaved golden saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* are found in the northern part of the wood. In addition, 77 bryophyte species (mosses and liverworts) and almost 300 species of fungi have been recorded. The insect fauna is also diverse.

There are a number of ponds within the wood including those in the south originating from a series of old marl workings. Although most are silted up and heavily shaded, a number of aquatic plant species do occur including fine-leaved water dropwort *Oenanthe aquatica*, pink water-speedwell *Veronica catenata* and the water crowfoot *Ranunculus aquatilis*. The latter species is scarce in Kent. Seven dragonfly species have been recorded from the pond's vicinity and frogs and toads are frequent.

The wood supports a rich breeding bird community, including lesser spotted woodpecker and woodcock. Nightingales have also bred in the past.