

COUNTY: KENT      SITE NAME: ALKHAM, LYDDEN AND SWINGFIELD  
WOODS

DISTRICT: DOVER/SHEPWAY

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

Local Planning Authority: Dover District Council, Shepway District Council

National Grid Reference: TR 260440      Area: 226.1 (ha.) 558.7 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 179      1:10,000: TR 24 SW, SE, NE

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

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

Other Information:

This site was formerly two SSSIs: Alkham Valley Woods and Lydden to Swingfield  
Downs. The former is included in 'A Nature Conservation Review'. There have been a  
few minor deletions.

This site comprises several woodlands situated on the steep slopes of dry chalk valleys.  
The soils vary from calcareous loams on the slopes to acid-neutral clays on the  
plateaux. Ash-hazel is the main woodland type with field maple on the more calcareous  
soils and hornbeam on the heavier clay. There is some unimproved chalk grassland in  
the site near Lydden. A number of uncommon plants occur including lady orchid *Orchis  
purpurea* in the woods and burnt orchid *Orchis ustulata* in the grassland.

These woods have been managed by coppicing. Ash and hazel are the common  
coppiced species with some field maple, hornbeam and sweet chestnut under  
pedunculate oak standards. Other trees and shrubs include wild cherry, birch,  
hawthorn, blackthorn and also wayfaring-tree and dogwood on the calcareous soils.  
There is some dense hawthorn scrub in places.

The ground flora is varied but generally dominated by dog's mercury *Mercurialis  
perennis*, bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* and brambles *Rubus fruticosus*. Among  
more abundant flowering plants are wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, yellow  
archangel *Lamiastrum galeobdolon* and wood spurge *Euphorbia amygdaloides*. Some  
uncommon plants also occur, particularly on the chalk soils. These include green  
hellebore *Helleborus viridis*, herb paris *Paris quadrifolia*, fly orchid *Ophrys insectifera*,  
greater butterfly orchid *Platanthera chlorantha* and lady orchid. The latter is restricted in  
Britain to Kent.

The chalk grassland is dominated by sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina*, tor-grass  
*Brachypodium pinnatum* and glaucous sedge *Carex flacca*. Many flowering plants  
typical of improved chalk grassland occur such as dropwort *Filipendula vulgaris*, salad  
burnet *Sanguisorba minor*, small scabious *Scabiosa columbaria* and several orchids  
including burnt orchid.