

COUNTY: EAST SUSSEX SITE NAME: DARWELL WOOD

DISTRICT: ROTHER

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

Local Planning Authority: ROTHER DISTRICT COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: TQ 710202 Area: 37.6 (ha.) 92.9 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 199 1:10,000: TQ 72 SW, TQ 71 NW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1966 Date of Last Revision: –

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

Other Information:

Reasons for Notification:

This site consists of a relatively large area of broadleaved woodland deeply dissected by a number of streams which drain into Darwell Reservoir to the north. The site probably represents the best example of hornbeam coppice with oak standards in Sussex. A number of other woodland types are also found which are rare in the national context. A wide range of woodland birds also breed on this site.

Darwell Wood has developed over formations of the Ashdown Sands, Purbeck Beds and Wadhurst Clay. The resulting variation in geology has influenced the types of plants which are able to grow in different areas.

The majority of the site is dominated by mature hornbeam *Carpinus betulus* coppice with oak *Quercus robur* standards. Under the dense canopy the ground flora is sparse and consists mainly of mosses, although occasionally bluebells *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, bramble *Rubus fruticosus* and wood sorrel *Oxalis acetosella* form a more dense cover. On higher ground the oak/hornbeam woodland gives way to a more open silver birch *Betula pendula*–oak woodland, often with hazel *Corylus avellana* and some sweet chestnut *Castanea sativa* coppice. The ground flora here includes wood sage *Teucrium scorodonia*, bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and sanicle *Sanicula europea*.

In the west of the site calcareous soils support an ash *Fraxinus excelsior*–hazel wood with a ground flora comprised of plants indicative of base rich soils, amongst them ramsons *Allium ursinum*, bee and pyramidal orchids *Ophrys apifera* and *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, as well as several calcicolous mosses.

The streams which traverse the site have cut deeply into the underlying rock to produce steep sided valleys. The valley floors are dominated by alder *Alnus glutinosa*, with local abundancies of grey willow *Salix cinerea* above a ground flora of pendulous sedge *Carex pendula*, water mint *Mentha aquatica*, opposite-leaved golden saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* and ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*

The woodland supports a rich community of breeding birds which includes woodcock, green woodpecker, sparrowhawk and tawny owl.