

Notification Date: 16 July 1986

COUNTY: GLOUCESTERSHIRE

SITE NAME: SHORN CLIFF & CASWELL
WOODS

DISTRICT: FOREST OF DEAN

SITE REF: 15 WK6

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

Local Planning Authority: GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL, Forest of Dean District Council

National Grid Reference: SO 540005, SO 540990 Area: 69.2 (ha.) 171.0 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 162 1:10,000: SO 50 SW & ST 59 NW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): –

Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

New site. Within the Wye Valley AONB.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

The woodlands of the lower Wye Valley form one of the most important areas for woodland conservation in Britain, comparable with the Caledonian pine-woods, the oceanic oakwoods of western Britain, the New Forest and the mixed coppices of East Anglia. Semi-natural woodland is abundant and virtually continuous along the gorge. The woods are a mixture of many types, some of which are very localised, for example the lime-sessile oak stands on limestone, beech stands on both acid and alkaline soils in which lime *Tilia* spp., elm *Ulmus* spp. oak *Quercus* spp. and other species share dominance. Most woods are a rich mixture of stand types which are believed to be similar in composition to the original natural woods of the valley. Many rare and local species are present, including some of the rarest native tree species, for example large-leaved lime *Tilia platyphyllos*, whitebeams *Sorbus* spp. and trees close to the edge of their European range, for example hornbeam *Carpinus betulus* and beech *Fagus sylvatica*. Furthermore these woods sit in a matrix of unimproved grassland and other semi-natural habitats which, together with the woods, make the Wye Valleys one of the most diverse, rich and attractive areas in southern Britain.

Shorn Cliff and Caswell Woods overlie the Carboniferous Limestone and Old Red Sandstone of the eastern slopes of the lower Wye Gorge. They form part of a continuous belt of woodland which stretches from Brockweir to Tutshill. It contains an exceptional number of semi-natural woodland stand types and several rare or uncommon plant species.

On the upper slopes the woodland is generally dominated by beech, often in the form of ancient coppice. On the calcareous soils it is accompanied by small-leaved lime *Tilia cordata*, ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and yew *Taxus baccata*. Where occasional areas of more acidic soils occur, silver birch *Betula pendula* and oak accompany the beech. Ground vegetation under the mature woodland is generally very sparse, dominated by ivy *Hedera helix* and calcicolous species such as spurge laurel *Daphne laureola*. Where recent coppicing has been carried out the additional light has resulted in a dense growth of bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg.

The lower slopes have less beech and support two main types of woodland. Coppiced ash and small-leaved lime with occasional field maple *Acer campestre* forms one type (rare in the country as a whole) while the second is distinguished by the dominance of wych elm

Ulmus glabra, much of it now dead or dying as a result of Dutch Elm Disease. Shrubs such as hazel *Corylus avellana*, wayfaring-tree *Viburnum lantana* and guelder-rose *V. opulus* occur on these slopes. Here the ground flora is more varied with, in places, numerous ferns. These include hart's-tongue fern *Phyllitis scolopendrium*, soft shield-fern *Polystichum setiferum* and hard shield-fern *P. aculeatum*.

A small area of alder *Alnus glutinosa* is present over wetter soils adjacent to the River Wye in Caswell Wood (Lynweir Grove).

Some of the woodland rides are particularly rich floristically, especially along their margins. On the lower slopes of Shorn Cliff Woods are a number of base-rich springs and seepages. These provide a suitable environment for damp loving plants such as great horsetail *Equisetum telmateia*, hemp agrimony *Eupatorium cannabinum* and pendulous sedge *Carex pendula* as well as supporting an interesting bryophyte flora.

The whole site supports a variety of uncommon plants. These include the nationally rare wood fescue *Festuca altissima* and narrow-leaved bitter-cress *Cardamine impatiens* with the locally uncommon southern wood-rush *Luzula forsteri*, wild madder *Rubia peregrina*, lily-of-the-valley *Convallaria majalis* and tutsan *Hypericum androsaemum*. Upright spurge *Euphorbia serrulata* occurs in this part of the Wye Valley and martagon lily *Lilium martagon* is present in adjacent replanted woodland.

The exposures of bare limestone rock provide breeding sites for birds such as kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*.