COUNTY: OXFORDSHIRE **SITE NAME:** HOLTON WOOD

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

Local Planning Authorities: South Oxfordshire District Council, Oxfordshire County Council

National Grid Reference: SP603080

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 164 **1:10,000:** SP90 NE, SP60 NW

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1984 **Date of Last Revision:**

Area: 49.5 ha 122.3 ac

Description and Reasons for Notification

This is one of the least modified of the original woodlands representing what is left of the ancient Bernwood Forest. It supports a rich and interesting insect fauna.

The woodland is predominantly semi-natural and is a good example of relic coppice-with-standards typical of the poorly-drained Oxford Clay soils. It is unusual in having a good age range of fine pedunculate oak standards. Coppiced species include hazel, ash, pedunculate oak and field maple; trees include silver and downy birch, wild cherry, goat willow, aspen and wild service. The diverse shrub layer contains much honeysuckle and includes Midland hawthorn, also several blackthorn thickets, mostly concentrated on the margin. The ground flora includes a number of typical ancient woodland species, among them the relatively uncommon scaly male-fern *Dryopteris pseudomas*. Dominants are variable and include bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa* and dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*. A comprehensive network of rides of vary degrees of wetness includes some that are shaded and narrow and others that have been substantially widened to form open marshy meadows with scattered relic trees. Dominant grasses are the tufted hair-grass, Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*, sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and rough meadow-grass *Poa trivialis*, while wood small-reed *Calamagrostis epigejos* is locally dominant in wet areas. A few rides are *Juncus*-dominated, while vegetation in the most waterlogged rides is typified by species such as *Carex acutiformis*, *C. remota*, *Glyceria fluitans*, *Veronica beccabunga* and *Callitriche stagnalis*. Additional interest is provided by a small stream and a flushed area adjacent to it which contains golden saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* (uncommon in Oxfordshire) and marsh marigold *Caltha palustris*.

The coppice-with-standards structure, the largely open ride system and diversity of vascular plant species combine to provide a habitat of considerable importance for breeding birds, including nightingales, and for invertebrate fauna, among which 27 species of butterfly have been recorded, including several uncommon woodland species such as the white admiral *Limonitis camilla* and purple emperor *Apatura iris*.