

Notification Date: 11 May 1989

COUNTY: HEREFORD & WORCESTER

SITE NAME: MOCCAS PARK

DISTRICT: SOUTH HEREFORDSHIRE,
LEOMINSTER

SITE REF: 15 0MP

Status: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended. This site is a National Nature Reserve under Section 19 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949

Local Planning Authority: HEREFORD & WORCESTER COUNTY COUNCIL, South Herefordshire District Council, Leominster District Council

National Grid Reference: SO 341425

Area: 136.7 (ha.) 337.8 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 148

1:10,000: SO 34 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1963

Date of Last Revision: 1975

Date notified (Under 1981 Act): 1989

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Site listed in 'A Nature Conservation Review' edited by D A Ratcliffe, CUP, 1977.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Moccas Park is an ancient deer park lying on the northern flanks of a steep ridge known as Dorstone Hill overlooking the River Wye.

The Park is a famous Herefordshire landmark with documentation going back to at least the 16th Century, although it may well date from the Norman occupation when a motte and bailey castle existed there. The remains of this are still visible on the eastern edge of the park.

Dorstone Hill rising to 274 metres (900 feet) above sea level is composed of Old Red Sandstone. The soils derived from these rocks are mildly acidic loams. In the vicinity of Lawn Pool, in the lower part of the park, there are thin post-glacial peat deposits.

Moccas Park is one of the largest and most diverse examples of wood pasture remaining in Britain, ranking in national importance alongside the New Forest, Windsor Great Park and Sherwood Forest. The predominant parkland trees are oaks, both pedunculate *Quercus robur* and sessile *Q. petraea*, together with some ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, small-leaved lime *Tilia cordata* and beech *Fagus sylvatica*. Non-native species such as sweet chestnut *Castanea sativa* and horse chestnut *Aesculus hippocastanum* have been introduced, their fruits being valuable food for deer.

The steep, upper slopes of the northern area support a closed canopy of semi-natural woodland dominated by oaks, silver birch *Betula pendula* and rowan *Sorbus aucuparia* with a shrub layer of field maple *Acer campestre*, holly *Ilex aquifolium*, hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* and crab apple *Malus sylvestris*. The ground flora is dominated by bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*.

The Lawn Pool has gradually silted up over the past century with the result that the centre has developed into an island covered with dense carr consisting of alder *Alnus glutinosa* and willow *Salix* sp. The pool margins are dominated by common club-rush *Schoenoplectus lacustris*, bulrush *Typha latifolia*, bladder-sedge *Carex vesicaria* and greater spearwort *Ranunculus lingua*. The open water supports one of only two known populations of greater bladderwort *Utricularia vulgaris* in the county.

The ancient parkland trees are host to a wealth of plants and animals, many of the species being indicative of open woodland cover over a long period. 116 species of epiphytic lichen have been recorded including a number of uncommon species such as *Enterographa crassa*, *Peltigera horizontalis* and *Arthonia vinosa*.

The beetle fauna is particularly outstanding and has been well studied, with over 700 species having been recorded. Nineteen of these are national rarities of which *Hypabaenus flavipes* is found nowhere else in Britain and *Ernoporus caucasicus* and the scarlet longhorn *Phyrrhidium sanguineum* are confined to only one or two other sites in Britain. Many of the beetles are dependent on over mature and dead timber.

The Lawn Pool and the fen-like vegetation of its margins support a number of beetles more typical of East Anglia, such as *Atheta villis*, *Schistoglossa viduata*, *S. gemina* and *Bembidion quadripustulatum*. Moccas Park is the most westerly station in Britain for the last species. A further species, *Graphoderus cinereus*, is only known from one or two sites outside East Anglia, the nearest to Moccas Park being in Dorset.

In addition to the beetle fauna, the Park has considerable importance for other invertebrate groups. Flies of the family *Sepsidae* which are associated with the Lawn Pool and dead wood in the Park, are of national importance and include such rarities as *Brachypalpus laphriformis* and *Thrypticus nigricauda*. The open water attracts a number of dragonflies and damselflies including the broad-bodied chaser *Libellula depressa*. The very local aquatic bivalve mollusc *Pisidium pseudosphaerium* has been recorded in the pool.

The ancient parkland trees provide nesting sites for a wide range of birds including raven *Corvus corax*, buzzard *Buteo buteo*, redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* and pied flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca*.

Badger *Meles meles*, fox *Vulpes vulpes* and polecat *Mustela putorius* are all present on the site. The last species, once thought to be extinct in England, has recently recolonised this area from Wales.