

COUNTY: DEVON      SITE NAME: SHAUGH PRIOR WOODS

DISTRICT: SOUTH HAMS, WEST DEVON

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

Local Planning Authority: DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL, Dartmoor National Park Authority

National Grid Reference: SX 537638      Area: 89.6 (ha.) 221.3 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 201      1:10,000: SX 56 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1952      Date of Last Revision: 1976

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

Other Information:

Amended at 1986 revision by extension and deletion. In Dartmoor National Park. Part owned by the National Trust.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

The site is important for its ancient oak woodlands which support a rich lichen and moss flora including some rare and local species of lichen.

Situated on the south-west of Dartmoor the site is subjected to a strong Atlantic climate. Within an altitude range of 250 to 800m, the woodlands cover the steep valley slopes around the confluence of the Rivers Meavy and Plym. The parent rocks are granite and other acid igneous types and are frequently exposed as clitter or faces. The soils are well drained and of a gritty, loamy nature with a humose surface horizon in places.

The woodland canopy is dominated by Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur* and is largely derived from former coppice. Sessile Oak *Q. petraea*, Beech *Fagus sylvatica*, Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and Birch *Betula* spp. are present as co-dominants. Alder *Alnus glutinosa* occupies the banksides. The understorey is dominated by Hazel *Corylus avellana* with Holly *Ilex aquifolium*, Rowan *Sorbus aucuparia* and Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* being locally abundant; Alder Buckthorn *Frangula alnus* is scattered throughout the woods.

The ground flora, which is heavily grazed in places by sheep, has as its main constituents Bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*, Bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, Creeping Softgrass *Holcus mollis* and Bent grasses *Agrostis* spp. Honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum*, Wood Sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*, Herb Robert *Geranium robertianum* and Heath Bedstraw *Galium saxatile* are frequent, while patches of Greater Woodrush *Luzula sylvatica* occur along the river banks. Ferns are locally abundant, particularly on the moister, north facing slopes: typical species include Male-fern *Dryopteris filix-mas*, Broad Buckler-fern *D. dilatata*, Scaly Male-fern *D. affinis* and Hard Fern *Blechnum spicant*. Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*

occurs throughout and forms dense stands along woodland edges. Tunbridge Filmy-fern *Hymenophyllum tunbridgense* is well established, especially near the rivers.

The rich lichen communities vary through the site according to the degree of exposure. Around the sheltered, lower valleys the community is characterised by lowland old forest species such as *Arthonia didyma*, *Haematomma elatinum*, *Pannaria pityrea*, *Sticta limbata*, *Parmelia reddenda* and *Thelotrema lepadinum*. Locally rare species include *Alectoria subcana*, *Porina coralloidea* and *Enterographa hutchinsiae*. On higher ground a lichen flora occurs that is typical of exposed, upland oakwoods with a high rainfall. *Parmelia laevigata*, *P. taylorensis*, *Ochrolechia androgyna* and *Cladonia* spp. are characteristically abundant, whilst *Alectoria fuscescens*, *Sphaerophorus globosus* and the rare, western *Parmelia endochlora* and *Graphina ruiziana* occur.

There is a typical woodland breeding bird population, with such species as Buzzard *Buteo buteo*, Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*, Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopus major* and Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*, whilst Dipper *Cinclus cinclus* and Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* nest alongside the watercourses.