

COUNTY: NORTHAMPTONSHIRE **SITE NAME:** COOMBE HILL HOLLOW

District: Daventry

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

Local Planning Authority: Daventry District Council

National Grid Reference: SP 679836

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 141 **1:10,000:** SP 68 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1970 **Date of Last Revision:** 1970

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1983 **Date of Last Revision:**

Area: 4.38 ha 11 ac

Other Information: The site is managed under a formal agreement between the owner and the Nature Conservancy Council for England.

Description and Reasons for Notification

This small Coombe has a mixture of wildlife habitats but the major interest is the neutral grassland communities. These represent an acid soil variant of calcareous loam pastures, a geographically widespread grassland type but one now very restricted due to cultivation and agricultural improvement.

In Northamptonshire the remaining acreage, unaffected by fertilisers or herbicides, occurs on the steepest gradients in the west of the county. Coombe Hill Hollow is a fine example of the vegetation.

The soils are developed from Jurassic Middle Lias clays and silts and are varied in their chemistry, texture and drainage. These factors, together with a topographic influence, provide suitable conditions for a wide range of flowering plants. Typical species include brown bent *Agrostis capillaris*, red fescue *Festuca rubra*, Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*, crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, pignut *Conopodium majus*, tormentil *Potentilla erecta* and sheep's sorrel *Rumex acetosella*. The more lime-rich soils have harebell *Campanula rotundifolia*, lady's bedstraw *Galium verum* and mouse-ear hawkweed *Hieracium pilosella*. The turf supports locally-important butterfly populations such as gatekeeper and meadow brown. The Coombe slopes have patchy scrub of bramble, hawthorn, elder and gorse, grading into a long-established, wooded boundary. Together this forms a valuable habitat for birds, insects and mammals.