

County: Devon

Site Name: Stoke Woods

District: Exeter

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
Exeter City Council

National Grid Reference: SX 930963 **Area:** 92.2 (ha) 227.8 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 192 **1:10,000:** SX 99 NW

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

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

Other Information:

The boundary has been amended at this revision by extension and deletion.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

This site contains areas of ancient semi-natural woodland and recently managed woodland, supporting a good population of breeding birds.

These woods lie in the lower Exe valley, with a mainly north-westerly aspect, between 30 m and 140 m in altitude. Grits and shales of the Culm Measures (Carboniferous) underlie mostly gleyed soils, which are generally well drained except near streams. In places the soils have not been disturbed, so that original pedological profiles are available for study.

Much of the lower part of the woodland was present in ca. 1800. Parts are dominated by oak *Quercus* spp. or ash *Fraxinus excelsior*. Wild cherry *Prunus avium* and wild service tree *Sorbus torminalis* are present, and field maple *Acer campestre* at the eastern end. Beech *Fagus sylvatica* and sycamore *A. pseudoplatanus* are common in the central and western parts, and alder *Alnus glutinosa* and willows *Salix* spp. grow in the wetter valleys. Much of the site is actively managed, so there is a mixture of broad-leaved high forest, coppice, saplings and scrub, conifer plantations at various stages of growth, patches of tall herbs and grasses, and bare earth and short vegetation along paths.

The ground flora reflects the variety of drainage and cover. Some areas are dominated by great woodrush *Luzula sylvatica*, bramble *Rubus fruticosus* or bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, and there are patches of bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* and common cow-wheat *Melampyrum pratense*. Other areas support species indicative of more mineral-rich conditions, such as enchanter's nightshade *Circaea lutetiana*, dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, wood avens *Geum urbanum* and primrose *Primula vulgaris*. Wetter ground by the streams carries meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria* and pendulous sedge *Carex pendula*.

Over 40 species of woodland birds breed in Stoke Woods, such as buzzard *Buteo buteo*, tawny owl *Strix aluco*, all three British species of woodpecker, and nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* in some years. Several species of warbler nest in the Woods, with a particularly large population of wood warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*.

The site, being on the outskirts of Exeter, has been used for University and school education over many years.