

**COUNTY:** KENT

**SITE NAME:** ORLESTONE FOREST

**BOROUGH:** ASHFORD

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

**Local Planning Authority:** Ashford Borough Council

**National Grid Reference:** TQ 982350                      **Area:** 337.7 (ha.) 834.4 (ac.)

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:** 189                      **1:10,000:** TQ 93 NE; SE

**Date Notified (Under 1949 Act):** 1981

**Date Notified (Under 1981 Act):** 1989

**Other Information:**

This largely new site includes two areas managed by the KTNC as nature reserves. The site includes a former part of Ham Street Woods SSSI, incorporated with minor boundary changes.

**Reasons for Notification:**

This large ancient woodland site near Ham Street is an important invertebrate locality of national significance. Several hundred invertebrate (mainly insect) species have been found there, including 39 nationally rare species (listed in the British Red Data Books: 2 Insects) and 134 nationally scarce species. Several species are known in Britain only from this locality.

Traditional woodland management on this site has given rise to broadleaved woodland crossed by wide herb-rich grassy rides, with a number of marshy areas and pools. This traditional pattern has been severely altered in the last 40 years by modern forestry techniques; large areas have been clear-felled and replanted, resulting in dense conifer woodland of limited conservation interest. However, the diverse native woodland has survived in many areas in strips along rides, which together with the rides themselves and tall scrubby vegetation in young plantations provide the wide variety of inter-connecting micro-habitats needed by the many different invertebrate species. In addition the storm of October 1987 felled large areas of mature conifers, leaving open areas available for the natural regeneration of native woodland.

Broadleaved woodland within the site is mainly composed of oak *Quercus robur* and hornbeam *Carpinus betulinus* with other trees including willows *Salix caprea* and *S. cinerea*, aspen *Populus tremula*, birches *Betula pendula* and *B. pubescens*, field maple *Acer campestre* and wild service tree *Sorbus torminalis*. The woodland floor supports bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, wood sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*, primrose *Primula vulgaris*, and yellow archangel *Lamium galeobdolon*. A large number of the scarcest species of invertebrate feed specifically on the foliage of several of the broadleaved trees and shrubs, the most significant of which are aspen and oak. The animals associated with aspen are exceptional: the lesser belle moth *Colobochyla salicalis* (not found elsewhere in Britain) and a rare micro-moth *Nephopteryx hostilis* feed on the foliage. A scarce longhorn beetle *Saperda populnea* causes galls on aspen stems, which are also inhabited by a rare micro-moth *Cydia corallana*. A rare weevil *Dorytomus affinis*, which feeds in aspen catkins has only been recorded in one other place in Britain recently. The foliage of oak supports a rare micro-moth *Microthrix similella*, the rare orange upperwing moth *Jodia crocego*, the rare 'scarce merveille-du-jour' moth *Moma alpium* and the rare dark and light crimson underwing moths, *Catocala promissa* and *Catocala sponsa* as well as a rare sawfly *Pamphilius sylvarum*. Other trees and shrubs support a rare leaf beetle *Crococephalus sexpunctatus* and

the rare triangle moth *Heterogenea asella*. Many invertebrate species are dependent upon a variety of dead-wood habitats, and at Orlestone rare species include a jewel beetle *Agrilus viridis*, the beetles *Tropideres sepicola*, *Tropideres niveirostris*, *Platypus cylindricus*, *Tomoxia bucephala* and *Cis coluber* and a flat-bug *Aradus aterrimus*.

Ponds and wet areas in the clay soils of the woodland support a further important range of species. The water beetle *Limnebius crinifer* has not been found elsewhere in Britain, and other rare species include the great silver water beetle *Hydrophilus piceus*, the water beetle *Hydrovatus clypealis* and a crane-fly *Molophilus lackschewitzianus*. Scarce species include a northern heathland water beetle *Acilus canaliculatus* and 17 others.

The rides and open areas within the woodland provide sheltered feeding areas for animals living in the surrounding woodland, and also support many species directly. The vegetation is acidic grassland, dominated by common bent *Agrostis capillaris* and creeping soft-grass *Holcus mollis*, with many broadleaved herbs including lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica*, ling heather *Calluna vulgaris* and devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*. Invertebrates dependent on these habitats include an exceptional number associated with goldenrod *Solidago virgaurea* including the rare micro-moth *Platyptilia calodactyla*. Other invertebrates of these open areas include the toadflax brocade moth *Calophasia bunula* and a solitary wasp *Symmorphus connexus*; many scarce species include pear-bordered fritillary butterfly *Boloria euphrosyne* living at the edge of rides.

The wide variety of habitats within the site also supports a diverse bird community: breeding species include lesser-spotted woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*, nightingale *Lucinia segarhynchos*, hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*, crossbill *Loxia curvirostra* and woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*.