

County: Hampshire **Site Name:** Roydon Woods SSSI

Local Planning Authority: Hampshire County Council, New Forest District Council

National Grid Reference: SU 325010–SU 310005–SZ 325998

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 196 **1:25,000:** SU 30, SZ 39

Area: 269.35 (ha) 665.56 (ac)

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1979 **Date of Last Revision:** –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985 **Date of Last Revision:** –

Other Information:

A nature reserve owned by the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Naturalists' Trust.

Reasons for Notification:

Roydon Woods Site of Special Scientific Interest comprises extensive deciduous woodland on plateau gravel, Barton Clays and Headon Beds in the valley of the Lymington River, adjoining the New Forest. Much of the woodland is ancient in origin or is derived from infilled or inter-planted open wood pasture, the numerous relicts of which survive as groups or scatters of old, large-crowned trees. Parts of the present woodland are derived from oak/hazel coppice planted on former fields in the 19th century. The combination of a wide range of woodland and associated plant communities rich in plants and animals, together with the contrasts afforded by close proximity to the New Forest, which has had a very different land use history, afford special research opportunities.

The woodland is mainly dominated by oak *Quercus* and hazel *Corylus avellana*, with beech *Fagus sylvatica* occurring on drier, free-draining sites. However, a wide range of woodland stand types are present, including a structurally diverse stand of hornbeam *Carpinus betulus* in a riverine situation, and a species-rich alder carr *Alnus glutinosa* along parts of the valley axis. There are numerous open glades and the Site of Special Scientific Interest includes a section of the Lymington River, which still supports otters *Lutra lutra*.

In contrast to the neighbouring New Forest, but on similar soils, the woodland is ungrazed. It is conspicuously more luxuriant and rich in species than the Forest woodlands. Some 270 species of flowering plants occur, of which 62 are considered to be indicative of a long continuity of woodland cover.

Some of the individual stand types present are notably rich in flowering plants, the alder carr particularly so, with abundant narrow-leaved lungwort *Pulmonaria longifolia*, wood club-rush *Scirpus sylvaticus*, water avens *Geum rivale*, great horsetail *Equisetum telmateia* and thin-spike wood sedge *Carex strigosa* dominating a community which is much richer in species and abundance of individuals than comparable alder carr in the Forest.

The Site of Special Scientific Interest supports a small herd of red deer *Cervus elaphus*, one of two surviving groups in the New Forest area. There is reason to believe that these animals are derived from ancient, indigenous stock, in contrast to the introduced groups further north in the Forest and South Wiltshire.

Populations of small rodents, notably wood mice *Apodemus sylvaticus* and bank voles *Clethrionomys glareolus* are high compared with the New Forest, where competition with large herbivores has virtually eliminated small rodents. Correspondingly, mammalian predators, notably stoats *Mustela erminea* and weasels *M. nivalis*, are numerous in contrast to their absence from the Forest. Some avian predators, notably buzzards *Buteo buteo* occur at a significantly higher density than in the New Forest. Hedgehogs *Erinaceus europaeus* and moles *Talpa europaea* are also common: both are absent from the New Forest, which though on similar parent soil materials, is considerably more impoverished and provides a smaller earthworm prey-base.