

County: Hampshire **Site Name:** Selborne Common SSSI

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

Local Planning Authority: Hampshire County Council, East Hampshire District Council

National Grid Reference: SU 734332

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 186

1:10,000: SU 73 SW

Area: 100.83 (ha) 249.16 (ac)

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1954

Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 22 August 1986

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

National Trust property. Registered and confirmed as common land with common rights of grazing.

Reasons for Notification:

Selborne Common lies on the north-east facing chalk scarp overlooking the western limits of the Weald. It consists of beech-dominated woodland on a steep east-facing chalk slope, grading to a more mixed plateau woodland with relict open acid grassland on clay-with-flints. The age structure of the beech hanger is varied but old generations are notably absent. The well developed ground flora, which is largely dominated by dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, ivy *Hedera helix* and bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, is species-rich, with abundant sanicle *Sanicula europaea*, wood spurge *Euphorbia amygdaloides*, spurge laurel *Daphne laureola* and woodruff *Galium odoratum*. Less frequently found plants include white helleborine *Cephalanthera damasonium*, toothwort *Lathraea squamaria*, bird's-nest orchid *Neottia nidus-avis*, broad-leaved helleborine *Epipactis helleborine* and violet helleborine *E. purpurata*, together with the rare pendulous helleborine *E. phyllanthes*, stinking hellebore *Helleborus foetidus* and large lords-and-ladies *Arum italicum*. The hangers also contain the largest known population in Hampshire of the rare moss *Mnium stellare*.

The vegetation of the clay-with-flints plateau, with its acid, wet soils, provides an interesting contrast to the beech hangers. Here the woodland is of comparatively recent origin and represents colonisation of former open common land by oak, hazel, hawthorn and blackthorn. A scatter of massive pollard beeches which clearly grew in open parkland conditions are survivals from the time when the common was open and regularly grazed. Relic acid grassland still persists locally, however, retaining such typical calcifuge species as wavy hair-grass *Deschampsia caespitosa*, heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile* and tormentil *Potentilla erecta*. Wood Pond, a small but ancient open water site, provides further diversity: its populations of smooth newts *Triturus vulgaris* and palmate newts *T. helveticus* are of special interest.

The SSSI also includes a small area of old downland turf; virtually all that remains of this habitat type in Selborne Parish. The species-rich sward, dense with anthills, contains such typical chalk herbs as pyramidal orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, cowslip *Primula veris*, common milkwort *Polygala vulgaris*, twayblade *Listera ovata* and burnet saxifrage *Pimpinella saxifraga*.

Selborne Common, with its suitably damp and calcareous environment, is a nationally important site for molluscs, having one of the richest woodland faunas of this group in Britain. At least 41 species occur, including such rarities as *Acicula fusca*, *Ena montana*, *Macrogastra rolphii* and *Phenacolimax major*. The old pollards and their associated dead wood habitats support a rich and interesting mature timber fauna, including several species of flies and a number of rare beetles, for example: *Diplocoelus fagi*, *Cerylon ferrugineum* and *Pyrochroa coccinea*. Approximately 30 species of butterfly have been recorded, including colonies of brown hairstreak, Duke of Burgundy fritillary, silver-washed fritillary, purple emperor and marbled white.