

COUNTY: GREATER LONDON     SITE NAME: HAMPSTEAD HEATH WOODS

BOROUGH: BARNET, CAMDEN AND HARINGEY

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

Local Planning Authority: Barnet, Camden and Haringey

National Grid Reference: TQ 270 875 & TQ 271 870     Area: 16.6 (ha.) 41.1 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 176     1:10,000: TQ 28 NE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1975

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1990

Other Information:

There are several boundary amendments from the former Hampstead Heath SSSI, including extensions.

Description:

Hampstead Heath Woods are examples of long-established high forest woodlands with an exceptional structure comprising an abundance of old and over-mature trees providing dead wood habitat for a range of invertebrate species. The site also includes an adjacent small valley containing an acidic flush with developing bog-moss communities.

The woods, comprising North Wood and the much larger Ken Wood to the south, lie on the upper slopes of Hampstead Heath where a residual capping of Bagshot Sands overlies the Claygate Beds. These give rise to acidic sand and loam-based soils which are generally free-draining, although localised impedance occurs particularly in the small valleys.

The sandy soils of the Bagshot Beds on the upper slopes of North Wood and to the south west of Ken Wood support stands of acid sessile oak-beech woodland, an uncommon stand-type in Greater London. Lower down on the sandy loam-based soils of the Claygate Beds, and particularly in a series of minor valleys where the drainage is poorer the stands grade into sessile oak woodland.

The woods contain a large number of over-mature trees, with maiden stems of considerable girth and height, and an abundance of dead limbs, fallen branches and whole fallen trunks. High forest stands of such over-maturity are nationally uncommon and particularly scarce in Greater London.

The canopy of both woods is heavily dominated by sessile oak *Quercus petraea* and beech *Fagus sylvatica*, although pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* occurs occasionally and wild service tree *Sorbus torminalis*, a species associated with ancient woodland rarely. In open areas where trees have fallen young downy birch *Betula pubescens* is frequent.

The shrub layer is dominated by holly *Ilex aquifolium* with rowan *Sorbus aucuparia*, hazel *Corylus avellana*, and the locally abundant introduced shrubs rhododendron *Rhododendron ponticum* and cherry laurel *Prunus laurocerasus*. This frequently dense understorey coupled with the acidic soils produces a typically limited ground flora which is dominated by bramble *Rubus fruticosus* and bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*. Other species recorded include bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* and species indicating long-established woodland such as wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa* and pignut *Conopodium majus*.

Adjacent to Ken Wood is a small valley containing an acidic flush dominated by soft-rush *Juncus effusus* and bog-moss *Sphagnum* species. Six bog-mosses have been recorded and water horsetail *Equisetum fluviatile*, a species scarce in Greater London, is also present. The drier fringes of the flush are dominated by grasses such as common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, creeping soft-grass *Holcus mollis* and tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa* with scattered silver birch *Betula pendula* and alder *Alnus glutinosa*.

The abundance of over-mature trees with decaying heartwood and dead standing and fallen timber provides suitable conditions for a specialist invertebrate fauna. Several beetles which are dependent on dead wood have been recorded here, including the nationally rare jewel beetle *Agrilus pannonicus* whose larvae develop in and under the bark of oak. This species is rare in Britain and is listed as vulnerable in the British Red Data Book.