

COUNTY: KENT

SITE NAME: DARENTH WOOD

BOROUGH: DARTFORD

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

Local Planning Authority: Dartford Borough Council

National Grid Reference: TQ 575722 Area: 121.79 (ha.) 300.94 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 177 1:10,000: TQ 57 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1968 Date of Last Revision: 1981

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1989

Other Information:

Darenth Wood lies within the Dartford Green Belt. The site, which has undergone minor boundary changes, is listed in 'A Nature Conservation Review'*.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

This site comprises some of the most valuable areas of ancient semi-natural woodland in north-west Kent and includes several rare woodland types. The invertebrate fauna has been exceptionally well studied during the last two centuries and the wood has long been famous as a site supporting many rarities. There are recent records of 2 nationally rare** species and 32 nationally scarce species and historic records of a further 40 Red Data Book species and 200 nationally scarce species.

The wood has been managed as coppice-with-standards for centuries and this traditional management has given rise to broadleaved woodland with areas of open heathland forming extensive glades. Changes in traditional practices over the last 40 years have resulted in much of the site lying unmanaged.

The range of soils that occur throughout the site has given rise to several distinct woodland types. Acidic birch *Betula spp* -- sessile oak *Quercus petraea* woodland lies on the lighter soils of the plateau gravel covering the higher areas of ground. An unusual example, this woodland reflects the high chalk content of the soil and is more closely related to continental types than to those found elsewhere in Britain. Associated shrubs include field maple *Acer campestre*, dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*, wayfaring tree *Viburnum lantana* and midland hawthorn *Crataegus leavigata*. The ground flora is dominated by bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and bramble *Rubus fruticosus* and includes much lily-of-the-valley *Convallaria majalis*. Substantial bracken glades occur throughout this woodland type and locally acidic conditions favour broom *Cytisus scoparius* and gorse *Ulex europaeus*.

The shallow chalk soils at the base of the slopes support sessile oak-hornbeam *Carpinus betulus* woodland. This particular type of woodland is very rare in Britain, being known only from North Kent, and Darenth Wood is the largest known example. Common shrub associates include field maple, ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and spindle *Euonymus europaeus* whilst the wild service tree *Sorbus torminalis* has also been recorded. The field layer is dominated by dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* with

wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa* and bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* as frequent associates. White helleborine *Cephalanth damasonium* and bird's-nest orchid *Neottia nidus avis* are also found in this woodland type.

The more acidic light to medium soils of the Blackheath sands found on the sloping ground support an acidic hazel *Corylus avellana*-sessile oak woodland. It has a rich tree and shrub flora including downy birch *Betula pubescens*, wild cherry *Prunus avium*, holly *Ilex aquifolium* and elder *Sambucus nigra*. Bramble and ivy *Hedera helix* are found most frequently in the field layer although species such as bittersweet *Solanum dulcamara* and cow-wheat *Melampyrum pratense* also occur.

Many of the invertebrate species that have been recorded here are associated with dead wood and include the nationally rare beetles *Agrilis pannonicus* and *Platypus cylindricus*, both species living in dead or dying oak timber. Numerous bugs, beetles and moths, including the cloaked carpet moth *Euphyia biangulata* and the ground bug *Trapezonotus dispar*, are associated with the more open conditions found along the edges of the glades.

Immediately to the west of Darenth Wood is a small area of chalk grassland. The area supports a wide range of chalk-loving plants including the nationally rare and specially protected field eryngo or Watling Street thistle *Eryngium campestre* and the nationally scarce ground pine *Ajuga chamaepitys* and man orchid *Aceras anthropophorum*.

* 'A Nature Conservation Review' edited by D A Ratcliffe 1977.

** Listed in the Red Data Book: 2, Insects, edited by D B Shirt 1987, NCC.