

COUNTY: HEREFORD & WORCESTER

SITE NAME: COMMON HILL

DISTRICT: SOUTH HEREFORDSHIRE

SITE REF: 15WPS

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

Local Planning Authority: HEREFORD & WORCESTER COUNTY COUNCIL, South Herefordshire District Council

National Grid Reference: SO 588346

Area: 12.6 (ha.) 31.1 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 149

1:10,000: SO 53 SE, NE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1975

Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1989

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Site boundary alteration (extension and reduction). Part registered as Common Land. Within Wye Valley AONB. Part owned and managed by the Herefordshire Nature Trust.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

The site occupies a narrow ridge overlooking the Wye Valley. The ridge is composed of Silurian Wenlock Limestone and Ludlow Shales which have given rise to freely drained, calcareous soils. The site is important for its semi-natural woodland, unimproved grassland and invertebrate fauna.

The ancient broadleaved woodland contains a mosaic of four types of woodland which are of restricted national distribution. The dominant tree species is ash *Fraxinus excelsior* associated with sessile oak *Quercus petraea*, silver birch *Betula pendula* and wild cherry *Prunus avium*. Wild service-tree *Sorbus torminalis* and yew *Taxus baccata* are locally abundant. A few specimens of the nationally scarce large-leaved lime *Tilia platyphyllos* are present in the central part of the wood. The shrub layer contains coppiced hazel *Corylus avellana*, field maple *Acer campestre* and sessile oak as well as several typical calcicole (lime-loving) species such as wayfaring-tree *Viburnum lantana*, spindle *Euonymus europaeus*, dogwood *Cornus sanguinea* and spurge-laurel *Daphne laureola*. In areas where the soils are less well drained oak and ash are associated with wych elm *Ulmus glabra*. This type of woodland is only found on Silurian Limestones in the West Midlands.

The ground flora is dominated by bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, ivy *Hedera helix*, false brome *Brachypodium sylvaticum* and dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*. The nationally scarce stinking hellebore *Helleborus foetidus* is present in the wood along with several locally uncommon species such as greater butterfly-orchid *Platanthera chlorantha*, broad-leaved helleborine *Epipactus helleborine* and stinking iris *Iris foetidissima*.

There are scattered remnants of unimproved grassland as well as an old limestone quarry with associated spoil heaps, which have a rich flora. These limestone grasslands are of particular interest as their plant communities form an important link between those of the Oolitic limestone of the Cotswolds and the Carboniferous Limestone of the Wye Valley and South Wales. The grassland at Common Hill is one of the few remaining examples in Herefordshire. The sward is dominated by upright brome *Bromus erectus* associated with sheep's-fescue *Festuca ovina*, quaking-grass *Briza media* and yellow oat-grass *Trisetum flavescens*. Many of the herbs found here are uncommon in the county, including woolly thistle *Cirsium eriophorum*, dwarf thistle *C. acaule*, marjoram *Origanum vulgare*, yellow-wort *Blackstonia perfoliata* and common gromwell *Lithospermum officinale*. Some areas of grassland have been invaded by scrub such as wayfaring-tree, dogwood and wild privet *Ligustrum vulgare*.

The site supports a rich invertebrate fauna. Butterflies include the locally uncommon brown argus *Aricia argestis*, dingy skipper *Erynnis tages*, marbled white *Melanargia galathea* and three nationally scarce species: wood white *Leptidea sinapsis*, pearl-bordered fritillary *Boloria euphrosyne* and white-letter hairstreak *Strymonia w-album*. Three nationally scarce moths also occur: six-belted clearwing *Bembecia scopigera*, Cistus forester *Adscita geryon* and *Stigmella prunetorum*. The grasslands support glow-worm beetles *Lampyris noctiluca* which are restricted to areas of chalk or limestone.