

COUNTY: CHESHIRE

SITE NAME: WETTENHALL AND DARNHALL  
WOODS

DISTRICT: CREWE AND NANTWICH, Vale Royal

SITE REF: 15WCM

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

Local Planning Authority: CHESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL, Borough of Crewe and Nantwich, Vale Royal District Council

National Grid Ref: SJ 640624

Area: 52.6 (ha.) 130.0 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 118

1:10,000: SJ 66 SW, SJ 66 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1979

Date of Last Revision: 1979

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Site Boundary alteration (extension & reduction).

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Cheshire is a poorly wooded county and many of the woodlands of the highest wildlife value survive in steep valleys or 'cloughs'. The upper slopes of the cloughs usually have leached acidic soils derived from glacial deposits, whilst the lower slopes which cut through Keuper Marl are more base-rich. The variations in soils and drainage result in dramatic differences in the species composition of the canopy and ground flora, often over short distances. This increased diversity adds considerably to the wildlife value of the woodland.

Wettenhall and Darnhall Woods consists of a series of woodlands and grasslands lying in the valley of the Wettenhall Brook. The woodland is large and diverse containing the best example of a suckering elm woodland in Cheshire. The areas of unimproved grassland contain many uncommon species adding considerably to the value and interest of this site.

Most of the woodland is dominated by pedunculate oak *Quercus robur*, ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and hazel *Corylus avellana*, but in places English elm *Ulmus procera* is or was abundant. There are a number of the uncommon wild service-tree *Sorbus torminalis* present and in the wetter areas alder *Alnus glutinosa* is common.

In most parts of the wood the shrub layer is well developed consisting of hazel, hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* and elder *Sambucus nigra*. Dogwood *Cornus sanguinea* and spindle *Enonymus europaeus* are also present but are infrequent.

On the upper slopes of the wood creeping soft-grass *Holcus mollis*, male fern and broad buckler-fern *Dryopteris filix-mas* and *D. dilatata* and bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* are abundant. On the lower slopes species such as dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, wood melick *Melica uniflora* and woodruff *Galium odoratum* occur. Two uncommon species are present: giant bellflower *Campanula latifolia* and thin-spiked wood-sedge *Carex strigosa*. Several wet areas are dominated by common reed *Phragmites australis* and yellow iris *Iris pseudacorus*.

The two areas of grasslands are botanically rich. The westerly has uncommon species such as spiny restharrow *Ononis spinosa*, pepper saxifrage *Silaum silaus* and saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria*. The eastern is notable for the abundance of cowslip *Primula veris*, common spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza maculata*, common fleabane *Pulicaria dysenterica* and lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica*.