

File ref:

County: Hampshire **Site Name:** Botley Wood and Everett's and Muses Copses 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, Winchester City Council

National Grid Reference: SU 540104 **Area:** 349.5 (ha) 863.7 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 196 **1:25,000:** SU 50, SU 51

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): – **Date of Last Revision:** –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 20 February 1986 **Date of Last Revision:** –

Confirmed: 12 November 1986

Other Information:

Reasons for Notification:

Botley Wood and Everett's and Muses Copses Site of Special Scientific Interest comprises a large tract of woodland in a poorly-drained low-lying hollow at the junction of the Eocene beds and Upper Chalk in the south Hampshire Tertiary Basin.

Botley Wood proper, together with a number of adjoining copses, consists predominantly of conifer plantations established in the 1960s or before. Despite coniferisation it is of exceptional importance for its rich insect populations, dependent upon the woodland clearings, broad herb-rich rides with abundant nectar sources and relict stands of semi-natural deciduous woodland. Much of the coniferous forest was planted into former coppice-with-standards woodland, though much of the western section was planted into wet species-rich pasture land, remnants of which are still visible along the wider rides. Conifer planting was not complete, and blocks of broad-leaved woodland survive, particularly in the north-west, though even here there has been considerable modification to the original stand, much of the area comprising young secondary birch woodland with planted oak. Where undisturbed, the semi-natural woodland cover consists largely of hazel coppice with oak/alder standards on the drier, acidic soils, grading to damp alder woodland on the poorly-drained clay. The alder is mostly grown from old coppice and supports a lush, species-rich ground flora dominated by pendulous sedge *Carex pendula*, and including yellow archangel *Lamiastrum galeobdolon*, wood sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*, wood speedwell *Veronica montana*, bugle *Ajuga reptans*, and both wood and remote sedges *Carex sylvatica* and *C. remota*.

The ride vegetation is very varied, depending on the base status of the soil, with species ranging from the ling *Calluna* at one extreme to calcicoles like enchanter's nightshade *Circaea lutetiana*, spindle *Euonymus europaeus* and glaucous sedge *Carex flacca* at the other. Most rides are dominated by grasses, but all include abundant herbs, sedges and rushes. Commonly occurring flowers include devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, primrose *Primula vulgaris*, betony *Stachys officinalis*, saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria*, yellow pimpernel *Lysimachia nemorum* and common dog-violet *Viola riviniana*. On damper ground rushes *Juncus* species predominate, particularly *J. effusus*, *J. inflexus* and *J. conglomeratus*, with abundant fleabane *Pulicaria dysenterica*, Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*, purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa* and pendulous sedge *Carex pendula*.

It is on the open ride complex with its rich field layer and abundance of flanking shrubs, for example, brome *Sarothamnus scoparius*, willow *Salix* spp., alder buckthorn *Frangula alnus* and blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, etc., that the rich invertebrate interest at Botley Wood largely depends. In particular, Botley Wood is a nationally outstanding woodland for butterflies, with over 30 species breeding annually, including large populations of pearl-bordered fritillary *Clossiana euphrosyne* (the largest known in Hampshire), small pearl-bordered fritillary *C. selene*, silver-washed fritillary *Argynnis paphia* (one of the strongest Hampshire colonies), purple emperor *Apatura iris*, white admiral *Ladoga camilla*, white-letter hairstreak *Strymonidia w-album*, dark-green fritillary *Mesoacidalia aglaja* and marsh fritillary *Eurodryas aurinia* in an atypical woodland situation. Over 600 species of moths have been recorded (including a number of extreme rarities) together with a wide variety of other insects including the bush crickets *Cynocephalus discolor* and *C. dorsalis* and the giant lacewing *Osmylus fulvicephalus*. The wood is also of ornithological importance and supports a wide spectrum of woodland breeding birds including woodcock and a substantial population of nightingales.

The extreme east of the Site of Special Scientific Interest embraces Everett's and Mushes Copses, two relatively small woods noted for their structural diversity and rich flora which arises from their position on the transition from plateau gravel to Reading Beds to Upper Chalk and their long history as woodland. The presence of mineral workings dating from different historical periods has added another dimension to the stand-types represented and, accordingly, to the species present. The stands vary from dry acid hazel-oak woodland over bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum* in the north, to ash-wych elm *Ulmus glabra* woodland with yew, coppiced stools of the rare small-leaved lime *Tilia cordata*, and a more species-rich flora over old chalk quarries in the south. The two copses collectively support an outstandingly rich flora with over 50 species of flowering plants indicative of ancient woodlands, including several which are local or rare, for example, orpine *Sedum telephium*, Solomon's-seal *Polygonatum multiflorum*, violet helleborine *Epipactis purpurata*, smooth-stalked sedge *Carex laevigata*, common cow-wheat *Melampyrum pratense* and Forster's woodrush *Luzula forsteri*. The woodland stand types represented are among the best examples of their kind in central southern England and the range of vegetation present gives rise to an exceptionally rich flora.