

COUNTY: KENT
ESCARPMENT

SITE NAME: HALLING TO TROTTISCLIFFE

DISTRICT: GRAVESHAM, ROCHESTER UPON MEDWAY, TONBRIDGE
AND MALLING

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

Local Planning Authority: ROCHESTER UPON MEDWAY BOROUGH
COUNCIL, Gravesham Borough Council, Tonbridge and Mailing District Council

National Grid Reference: TQ 616596-704660 Area: 648.41 (ha.) 1602.22 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 178, 188 1:10,000: TQ 65 NW, TQ66 SW,
SE, NE, TQ 76 NW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1951 Date of Last Revision: 1981

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1984 Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

This site was formerly known as Halling to Trottiscliffe Downs and is a 'Nature
Conservation Review' site.

Reasons for Notification:

This site consists of an extensive area of the North Downs west of the 'Medway
Gap'. The site is representative of Chalk grassland in west Kent and beech
woodland on the chalk. Outstanding assemblages of plants and invertebrates are
present.

A mosaic of habitats is present at this site with areas of grassland, scrub and
various types of woodland. The herb rich open downland is no longer grazed by
stock and consequently only small areas remain. A full range of different types of
scrub through to ash, yew, and beech woodland is present. The woodland
includes mature beech and yew on the steep slopes, oak standards and
predominantly sweet chestnut coppice with some hornbeam on the more level
higher ground; these two types of woodland support contrasting ground floras.

The chalk grassland, on warm south-facing slopes, is dominated by upright brome
Bromus erectus and sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina* but supports many other
plants which are characteristic of unimproved downland. Among these are dwarf
thistle *Cirsium acaule*, chalk milkwort *Polygala calcarea*, clustered bellflower
Campanula glomerata, horseshoe vetch *Hippocrepis comosa*, and several species
of orchid including the scarce musk orchid *Herminium monorchis* and man orchid
Aceras anthroporum. This range of food-plants and the warm conditions are
ideal for insects and the area is of great entomological importance. It is the only
known location in Britain for the moth *Hypercallia citrinalis* and several other
very scarce moths, beetles and grasshoppers also occur.

Some of the scrub is of entomological interest; there is an uncommon bug *Psylla viburni* which feeds on wayfaring tree for example. Overall hawthorn is the predominant species in the scrub but wayfaring tree and dogwood are also common. Climbers too are well represented with several rose species including the local burnet rose *Rosa pimpinellifolia* as well as traveller's joy *Clematis vitalba* which is abundant. The later stages of scrub succession resemble woodland with increasing numbers of trees such as ash, yew and beech present in addition to the shrubs.

The beech and yew woodland is on thin chalk soils and where the ground flora is not shaded dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* predominates. Associated with it is stinking iris *Iris foetidissima* and several very scarce species such as lady orchid *Orchis purpurea* and stinking hellebore *Helleborus foetidus*. The ground flora of the plateau woodland is quite different with bluebells *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* most abundant and with other species such as rosebay willowherb *Chamaenerion angustifolium* and bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*: these are generally restricted to non-calcareous soils.

The site supports a wide variety of birds with each of the habitats having its own characteristic community. Of greatest interest perhaps are the woodland birds; all three species of woodpecker breed here as do nuthatch and other hole-nesting species. Hawfinch is present at a higher density than in most other parts of Kent.