

COUNTY: LEICESTERSHIRE

SITE NAME: SWITHLAND WOOD AND THE BRAND

DISTRICT: CHARNWOOD

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

Local Planning Authority: CHARNWOOD BOROUGH COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: SK 539125

Area: 86.2 (ha.) 213.1 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 129

1:10,000: SK 51 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1956

Date of Last Revision: 1981

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1983

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

The site was formerly incorporated within “Bradgate Park, Swithland Wood, The Brand and Cropston Reservoir” SSSI.

Reasons for Notification:

The site includes some of the best remaining examples of oak-lime and alder woodland in Leicestershire and is representative of ancient woodland on somewhat acid, loamy soils in the English Midlands.

Biology

Swithland Wood occupies a gentle east-facing slope and is developed on somewhat, acidic clay loam and sandy loam soils derived mainly from marls and sandstones of the Triassic Keuper Marl series overlying rocks of Pre-Cambrian age. Most of the woodland is dominated by sessile oak *Quercus petraea*, silver birch *Betula verrucosa* and small-leaved lime *Tilia cordata*, in varying proportions. The shrub layer contains hazel *Corylus avellana* and the field layer is characterised by the abundance of creeping soft grass *Holcus mollis*, bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia caespitosa*, wavy hair-grass *D. flexuosa*, bramble *Rubus fruticosus* and great wood-rush *Luzula sylvatica*. Small streams in shallow valleys cross the centre and also the southern parts of the wood. In these valleys the soils are poorly drained and the woodland is dominated by alder *Alnus glutinosa* together with some pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* and ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, *Corylus avellana* is abundant in the shrub layer, while the field layer is characterised by pendulous sedge *Carex pendula* and broad buckler-fern *Dryopteris dilatata*. The wood as a whole contains a large number of plant species indicative of ancient woodland including hairy woodrush *Luzula pilosa*, broad-leaved helleborine *Epipactis helleborine*, cow-wheat *Melampyrum pratense*, and, beside the streams, opposite-leaved golden saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*. Within the northern part of the wood lies an area of unimproved neutral grassland which supports a range of characteristic plant species including saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria*, betony *Betonica officinalis* and adder’s tongue fern *Ophioglossum vulgatum*. The wood is also of value for the diversity of its breeding bird community.

The Brand is an area of former slate workings which have largely become recolonised by heath, scrub and sessile oak woodland. It possesses a rich lichen flora which includes many species which are rare in the East Midlands.