

COUNTY: HEREFORD & WORCESTER SITE NAME: BIRCH WOOD

DISTRICT: SOUTH HEREFORD

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

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

National Grid Reference: SO 611323 Area: 24.36 (ha.) 60.2 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 149 1:10,000: SO 63 SW

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985 Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

New site.

Within the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

The woodlands of the lower Wye Valley form one of the most important areas for woodland conservation in Britain, comparable with the Caledonian pinewoods, the oceanic oakwoods of western Britain, the New Forest and the mixed coppices of East Anglia. Semi-natural woodland is abundant and virtually continuous along the gorge. The woods are a mixture of many types, some of which are very localised, e.g. the lime-sessile oak stands on limestone, beech stands on both acid and alkaline soils in which lime *Tilia* spp., elm *Ulmus* spp., oak *Quercus* spp. and other species share dominance. Most woods are a rich mixture of stand types which are believed to be similar in composition to the original natural woods of the valley. Many rare and local species are present, including some of the rarest native tree species, e.g. large-leaved lime *Tilia platyphyllos*, whitebeams *Sorbus* spp. and trees close to the edge of their European range, e.g. hornbeam *Carpinus betulus* and beech *Fagus sylvatica*. Furthermore these woods sit in a matrix of unimproved grassland and other semi-natural habitats which, together with the woods, make the Wye Valley one of the most diverse, rich and attractive areas in southern Britain.

Birch Wood lies on rocks of the Old Red Sandstone series. The soils of the upper slopes are moderately acid and support sessile oak *Quercus petraea* associated with birch *Betula pendula* and hazel *Corylus avellana*. The lower slopes are more alkaline and dominated by ash *Fraxinus excelsior* with alder *Alnus glutinosa* on the wetter patches.

The ground vegetation reflects the variation found in the soils. Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and creeping soft-grass *Holcus mollis* dominate the upper slopes but further down the slopes a greater variety of species occurs. These include yellow archangel *Lamiastrum galeobdolon*, enchanter's nightshade *Circaea lutetiana* and male fern *Dryopteris filix-mas*. Birch Wood also has extensive colonies of wild daffodil *Narcissus pseudonarcissus* which are considered to be the best in the Wye Valley.