

COUNTY: HEREFORD & WORCESTER    SITE NAME: COUGHTON WOOD & MARSH

DISTRICT: SOUTH HEREFORD                      SITE REF: 15WD7

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

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

National Grid Reference: SO 590211                      Area: 1.2 (ha.) 3.0 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 162                      1:10,000: SO 52 SE

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

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

Other Information:

Within the Wye Valley 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty'. Part owned and managed as a nature reserve by The Herefordshire and Radnorshire Nature Trust. New site.

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 pine-woods, the oceanic oakwoods of Western Britain, the New Forest and the mixed coppices of East Anglia. Unlike most other regions, 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, eg the lime-sessile oak stands on limestone, beech stands on both acid and alkaline soils in which lime *Tilia* sp., 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, eg large-leaved lime *Tilia platyphyllos*, whitebeams *Sorbus* spp. and trees close to the edge of their European range, eg 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.

Coughton Wood has been selected as the largest remaining example of alder *Alnus glutinosa* woodland, which is one of the rarest types of woodland represented in the Wye Valley.

The site lies on the rich, neutral to alkaline alluvial soils of the river valley near Ross on Wye. The woodland is dominated by alder, which is traditionally coppiced. Other tree species include ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, silver birch *Betula pendula*, downy birch *B. pubescens*, and grey willow *Salix cinerea*. The woodland also contains a variety of native shrubs including spindle *Euonymus europaeus*, dogwood *Cornus sanguinea* and blackcurrant *Ribes nigrum*.

Associated with the woodland is a small area of marsh which is a surviving fragment of the once extensive Coughton Marsh. Prior to its drainage and agricultural reclamation this was one of the most important marshland sites in Herefordshire. The marsh, which extends into the coppice woodland, supports a rich flora including such characteristic species as marsh marigold *Caltha palustris*, yellow iris *Iris pseudacorus*, marsh valerian *Valeriana dioica* and pendulous sedge *Carex pendula*. In the drier parts of the site devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis* and early-purple orchid *Orchis mascula* occur.