

COUNTY: DORSET                      SITE NAME: MELBURY PARK

DISTRICT: WEST DORSET

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

Local Planning Authority: WEST DORSET DISTRICT COUNCIL, Dorset County Council

National Grid Reference: ST 576058                      Area: 255.0 (ha.) 630.1 (ac.)

Ordinance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 194                      1:10,000: ST 50 NE, SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1977                      Date of Last Revision: –

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

Other Information:

Site boundary amended by extension and deletion.

Reasons for Notification:

A surviving remnant of the Forest of Blackmoor, Melbury Park was probably enclosed as a deer park in the late 15th century. The site has a varied topography and includes several small streams. This, together with the rare continuity of park woodland including individual trees of great antiquity, helps to explain the exceptional importance of this site for lichens. Indeed it is one of the richest localities for epiphytic lichens in Europe.

The park has many exotic and ornamental trees but large areas have open semi-natural woodland. Many of the trees are very large and some are extremely old. Oak *Quercus robur* dominates most of the woodland but Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and Beech *Fagus sylvatica* are also frequent and in wetter areas Alder *Alnus glutinosa*, Willow *Salix* and Birch *Betula* occur. There are also specimen trees and avenues which include Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* and Horse Chestnut *Aesculus hippocastanea*. The grassland in much of the deer park is unimproved but it is unusually poor in herbs. This is perhaps caused by the long history of deer grazing.

Most of the lichen communities at Melbury are associated with acid bark, typical of Oak. *Graphidion*, *Calicion* and *Usneion* communities are well represented but it is the *Parmelietum perlatae* community which is the most widespread. Probably the most impressive lichen community is the *Lobarion pulmonariae* which here is the most luxuriant and widespread in lowland England. It is best developed in the west of the deer park and includes many rare species, such as *Agonimia octospora*, *Lecanactis amylacea*, *Pannaria conoplea*, *Sticta limbata* and *Thelopsis rubella*. Another community, the *Xanthorion* is typical of enriched bark. It was particularly well developed on elm *Ulmus* spp. at Melbury, but is still represented on the base-rich bark of Ash, Sycamore, Elder *Sambucus nigra*, Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and Maple *Acer campestre*. The community is best developed in the south-east of the

park and amongst its many component species has *Anaptychia ciliaris* and the rare *Teloschistes flavicans*.

Further rare lichens at Melbury include *Cetrelia olivetorum*, *Lecidea sublivescens*, *Pertusaria velata* and *Phyllospora rosei*. Altogether more than 250 species of lichens are recorded from Melbury, of which well over 200 are epiphytes.