

COUNTY: KENT            SITE NAME: ILEDEN AND OXENDEN WOODS

DISTRICT: CANTERBURY

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

Local Planning Authority: CANTERBURY CITY COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: TR 219525      Area: 87.9 (ha.) 217.2 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 179      1:10,000: TR 825 SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1968      Date of Last Revision: –

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

Other Information:

This site lies within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The boundary of the site has been slightly modified by two minor extensions.

Reasons for Notification:

The site is representative of east Kent plateau woodland on Upper Chalk and thin chalk drifts. The range of soil types present is reflected in the variety of stand types and the diversity of the ground flora. Two of the stand types represented on this site are nationally rare. The rotational coppicing of large areas, combined in a mosaic with high forest stands adds to the structural diversity of the wood and has resulted in the presence of a very rich breeding bird community, including nightingale (17 pairs in 1985) and hawfinch. Two nationally rare plants also occur.

Three woodland stand types can be distinguished on this site. Ash-maple woodland tends to predominate on the driest soils, where there are very few oak *Quercus robur* standard trees. Oak-ash-beechwood occurs chiefly on the thinnest soils, whilst oak-hornbeam stands are mainly confined to areas where the deepest head and dry valley deposits have accumulated. Past management has obscured these woodland-types in some areas, ie where the widespread planting of sweet chestnut *Castanea sativa* and blocks of coniferous trees has taken place. Coppiced hazel *Corylus avellana* occurs throughout the wood, while whitebeam *Sorbus aria*, holly *Ilex aquifolium*, wild cherry *Prunus avium* and sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* are locally frequent.

Where the canopy is not too dense, the shrub layer is well developed. Species such as wayfaring tree *Viburnum lantana* and wild privet *Ligustrum vulgare* indicate the calcareous nature of the substrate whilst others such as midland hawthorn *Crataegus oxycanthoides* and spurge laurel *Daphne laureola* are indicative of ancient woodland.

The ground flora is very rich, especially in the southern half of the wood where the soil is more calcareous. Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and bramble *Rubus fruticosus* are the most abundant species, but a number of others characteristic of ancient woodland also occur including herb paris *Paris quadrifolia*, wood spurge *Euphorbia amygdaloides* and early purple orchid *Orchis mascula*. Other orchids present include fly *Ophrys insectifera*, lesser butterfly *Platanthera bifolia* and two rarities, the lady orchid *Orchis purpurea* a species largely confined to Kent and the narrow-lipped helleborine *Epipactis leptochila*.

Most of these woodland floor plants grow best in the years immediately following coppicing, but a continuation of woodland cover with alternating periods of shade and light as the coppice grows and is re-cut, is necessary for their survival in the longer term.

Some of the middle section of the wood is of recent secondary origin and provides an interesting contrast to the structure and species composition of the ancient woodland.

Although as yet unrecorded, it is likely that this site supports a rich invertebrate fauna.