

COUNTY: WEST SUSSEX/SURREY

SITE NAME: CHIDDINGFOLD FOREST

DISTRICT: CHICHESTER/WAVERLEY

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

Local Planning Authority: CHICHESTER DISTRICT COUNCIL AND WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

National Grid Ref: SU 986 357; SU 994 310;  
TQ 017 344

Area: 543.9ha (1344 acres)

Ordnance Survey Sheets 1:50,000: 186

1:10,000: SU 93NE; SU 93SE  
TQ 03NW; TQ 03SW

Date notified (under 1949 Act): 1975 (White Beech Pockford), 1980 (Kingspark Wood)

Date notified (under 1981 Act): 1991

Other Information: This site lies within the Low Weald Natural Area and parts lie within the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). This is a renotification and extension of the White Beech Pockford and Kingspark Wood SSSIs and includes a Surrey Trust Reserve, and a Woodland Trust reserve.

### Reasons for Notification

Chiddingfold Forest consists of a number of areas of woodland which together form the largest more or less continuous area of oakwoods on the Weald Clay. It consists of a mixture of woodland types ranging from ancient oak woodland to coniferous plantation and includes many semi-natural types of woodland supporting a wide range of floristic communities. Many of the streams on the site cut deep into the clay and support a relict gill flora and fauna. The variety of woodland types, the gills, and the well-maintained rides provide habitats for a rich variety of insects and the site supports many nationally rare invertebrates and a number of regionally scarce bryophytes and lichens. The site is also noted for its diverse community of breeding birds.

The forest lies mainly on the Weald Clay which gives rise to neutral to slightly acidic soils, but there are parts, particularly in the gills, which are more basic (lime rich) with local outcrops of Paludina Limestone. Some of the higher parts are more acidic; these tend to have more silty or sandy soils, and heathland species occur on rides in these areas. The site is linked to other woodland areas and forms part of a much larger, but discontinuous, area of forest.

The importance of the site principally rests on the variety of woodland types present which provide a complex mosaic of habitats. The oldest semi-natural broadleaf areas are dominated by sessile oak *Quercus petraea* and hornbeam *Carpinus betulus*, with hazel *Corylus avellana* forming the bulk of the shrub layer with

occasional holly *Ilex aquifolium*, and hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*. Silver birch *Betula pendula* is found in dryer areas. The herb layer is composed of such species as bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scriptus*, enchanter's nightshade *Circaea lutetiana* and honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum*.

Other areas are dominated by pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* and ash *Fraxinus excelsior* along with some beech *Fagus sylvatica* over hazel coppice and hawthorn, or by pedunculate oak, hornbeam, silver birch and hazel. On permanently damp ground near streams mature ash is occasionally dominant over hazel coppice with a dense ground flora of false-brome *Brachypodium sylvaticum*, opposite-leaved golden-saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*, bluebell and bugle *Adjug reptans*.

Good specimens of the wild service tree *Sorbus torminalis* grow in several of the constituent woodlands. The greater butterfly orchid *Platanthera chlorantha* is found in Kingspark, Ashpark and Sidney Woods.

In other parts the forest consists of various combinations of sessile oak, pedunculate oak, birch and hazel forming typical lowland woodland communities with a good ground flora. Interspersed with these, and the preceding woodland types, are considerable areas of coniferous plantation consisting of Scots pine *Pinus sylvestris*, Corsican pine *Pinus nigra* subsp. *laricio*, Norway spruce *Picea abies*, western hemlock *Tsuga heterophylla*, and others. These plantations are usually dark and have ground floras limited to a few common mosses. The rides through them and the ride fringes, however, are often floristically and entomologically rich.

The gills, which are found in several parts of the forest support a flora often characteristic of ancient woodlands. The tree layer is dominated by alder *Alnus glutinosa*, aspen *Populus tremula*, ash and downy birch *Betula pubescens* overlying a rich ground flora of both vascular plants and bryophytes which flourish in the damp conditions.

The well developed and well maintained ride system supports a good diversity of plants and insects. False brome, common bent *Agrostis capillaris* and creeping bent *Agrostis stolonifera* dominate the grass species but other herbs vary with local conditions. Field horsetail *Equisetum arvense*, betony *Stachys officinalis* and heather *Calluna vulgaris* are locally abundant on drier ground, and common spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* and broad-leaved helleborine *Epipactis helleborine* are also found. The wetter rides support alternate-leaved golden-saxifrage *Chrysosplenium alternifolium*, water mint *Mentha aquatica*, lesser skullcap *Scutellaria minor* and soft rush *Juncus effusus*.

The woodland along the sides of a number of the rides has been sufficiently disturbed to lead to the development of a fairly dense hazel-birch scrub along with occasional aspen *Populus tremula*, grey willow *Salix cinerea*, goat willow *Salix caprea*, blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* and dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*. A few mature pedunculate oak standards have been left. Also included are a small number of recently felled areas which are reverting to low scrub. These are dominated by grey willow, hazel, bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and bramble *Rubus fruticosus*. Along with the rides these areas provide good invertebrate habitats.

The site generally is noted for its invertebrate interest, particularly Lepidoptera (butterflies & moths) and Coleoptera (beetles). Over 500 species of Lepidoptera have been recorded and these include many rarities. The large tortoiseshell *Nymphalis polychloros* (RDG: Endangered\*) has been recorded from the Kingspark and Ash Wood areas. The rare moths the rest harrow *Aplasta ononaria* (RDB: Rare\*) and the orange upperwing *Jodia croceago* (provisionally RDB: Rare\*) are found at several sites. Many species of

Coleoptera have been recorded and these include the two-spot wood-borer *Agrilus pannonicus* (RDB: Vulnerable\*), which is found in thick oak bark and is associated only with ancient woodlands, the pollen beetle *Mesosa nebulosa*, which is found on dry branches of deciduous trees, and the gallery-forming beetle *Xyleborus dispar* (both RDB: Rare\*). Diptera present include *Cheilosia carbonaria* and *Microdon eggeri* (both RDB: Rare\*) and a parasite of leaf-hoppers *Nephrocerus scutellatus* (RDB: Endangered\*). The woodland rides enable these invertebrate communities to thrive and the areas of scrub are utilised for breeding and larval development.

The Chiddingfold Forest area is noted for its ornithological interest due to its large size, its relatively undisturbed nature, and the diversity of woodland types. It supports a rich woodland bird community which includes breeding sparrow hawk *Accipiter nisus*, long-eared owl *Asio otus*, the lesser spotted woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*, nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*, hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*, and two very rare birds.

The abundance of rotting wood, the damp gill areas, the long disused section of the Arun and Wey Canal in Sidney Wood, and other damp areas support a rich variety of bryophytes. Parts of the site (White Beech, Pockford for example) have well over 100 species recorded from them. A number of regionally rare species occur, such as *Dicranum flagellare*, which grows on rotting stumps, and *Eurynchium speciosum*. There are several locally rare species including *Brachythecium plumosum* and *Climacium dendroides* which grow characteristically around the bases of trees in running water and these, therefore, are found in the gills. Species typical of ancient woodland such as *Rhytidiadelphus loreus* are also found.

#### NOTE

\* Nationally rare species are listed in the relevant Red Data Book (RDB), two of which have been published: 'British Red Data Book 1: Vascular Plants' and 'British Red Data Book 2: Insects'. The three RDB categories: Rare, Vulnerable and Endangered indicate increasing degrees of threat of extinction in Britain.