

COUNTY: SOMERSET

SITE NAME: RUTTERSLEIGH

DISTRICT: TAUNTON DEANE

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

Local Planning Authority: Somerset County Council, Taunton Deane District Council

National Grid Reference: ST 250165, 264166, 246170      Area: 97.0 (ha) 239.7 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 193      1:10,000: ST 21 NW, ST 21 NE

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1991      Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

A new site. A small part of the site was notified as part of the Britty Common SSSI under S.23 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 which was denotified in 1987 under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended 1985).

Description and Reasons for Notification:

This site comprises a mosaic of broadleaved woodland, scrub, bracken, mires and unimproved grassland which provides the habitat for several species of butterfly which are now scarce in Britain. Many of the habitats have a restricted distribution both nationally and in the South West. The site is also important for its lichens.

Ruttersleigh is located on the north-facing slope of the Blackdown Hills. The underlying geology consists mostly of Jurassic shales with smaller outcrops of Cretaceous Upper Greensand. The soils are mostly poorly drained clays with better drained soils over the Greensand. There are a number of springs and seepage lines within the site associated with the geological boundary and many streams rise within it, all of which drain down to the north. Much of the ground is seasonally very wet or permanently waterlogged.

The woodland includes stands where Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur*, Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and Field Maple *Acer campestre* are common as canopy forming trees with a shrub layer which includes Hazel *Corylus avellana* and Wych Elm *Ulmus glabra*. Where the ground is permanently waterlogged Alder *Alnus glutinosa* predominates.

The ground flora includes a number of species normally found only in ancient woodland such as Woodruff *Galium odoratum* and Wood Anemone *Anemone nemorosa*. Wood Horsetail *Equisetum sylvaticum*, which is rare in Somerset, is abundant and widespread on this site also being found in the areas of Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*.

In the wetter parts of woodland Pendulous Sedge *Carex pendula*, Marsh Valerian *Valeriana dioica*, Great Horsetail *Equisetum telmateia* and Wood Small-reed *Calamagrostis epigejos* all occur.

Bracken and Bramble *Robus fruticosus* cover quite large areas and patches of Birch *Betula spp.* and Sallow *Salix spp.* scrub are common.

The epiphytic lichen flora is also typical of ancient woodland and includes species such as *Lobaria pulmonaria*. The nationally scarce *Opegrapha corticola* and the nationally rare *Chaenotheca stemonea* also occur.

There are several areas of unimproved grassland. The nature of the sward varies considerably with the soil conditions, which are all mesotrophic or acidic. In the areas which are well drained the commonest grasses are Sweet Vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, Crested Dog's tail *Cynosurus cristatus* and Common Bentgrass *Agrostis capillaris* and where drainage is poorer Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* is most abundant. These grasslands are herb-rich and amongst the herb species are Devil's bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis* and Meadow Thistle *Cirsium dissectum*. A number of sedges *Carex spp.* also occur.

In one field a different mesotrophic grassland type occurs with abundant Tufted Hair-grass *Deschampsia caespitosa*. This area too is very herb-rich with species such as Dyer's Greenweed *Genista tinctoria* and Cowslip *Primula veris*.

In the very wettest areas associated with springlines and runnels, Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*, Bog Asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum*, Marsh St John's-wort *Hypericum elodes*, grow together with bog mosses such as *Sphagnum auriculatum* where conditions are most acidic. Where conditions are less acidic species such as Ragged Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi* and Marsh Marigold *Caltha palustris* occur amongst stands of Sharp-flowered Rush *Juncus acutiflorus* and Soft Rush *Juncus effusus*.

The woodland rides and glades provide ideal habitat for the nationally scarce Wood White *Leptidea sinapsis* butterfly, this site having by far the strongest colony known in Somerset. The grassland provides habitat for the nationally scarce Marsh Fritillary *Eurodryas aurinia* butterfly. Other butterfly species of note recorded recently include the nationally scarce species Duke of Burgundy Fritillary *Hamearis lucina* and Pearl – bordered Fritillary *Boloria euphrosyne* together with Small Pearl – bordered Fritillary *Boloria selene* and Silver – washed Fritillary *Argynnis paphia*.

The breeding birds include Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* and Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*.

Adder *Vipera berus*, Grass Snake *Natrix helvetica*, Slow-worm *Anguis fragilis* and Common Lizard *Lacerta vivipara* have all been recorded recently from the site.