

COUNTY: KENT SITE NAME: DOWN BANK

BOROUGH: ASHFORD

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

Local Planning Authority: ASHFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: TR 083522 Area: 6.05 (ha.) 14.9 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 189 1:10,000: TR 05 SW

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1990

Reasons for Notification:

This site lies on a steep south east facing slope and includes both unimproved and semi-improved chalk grassland with some areas of scrub and the edge of an ancient broadleaved woodland. These habitats support a diverse assemblage of plants including two nationally scarce* species, a nationally scarce butterfly and a nationally endangered moth.

The feature of greatest interest on the site is that it supports the largest known British colony of the nationally endangered+ black-veined moth *Siona lineata* (Red Data Book category 1). This moth is specially protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. There are also 28 butterfly species found here including the nationally scarce Duke of Burgundy *Hamearis lucina*.

Traditional grazing management ceased several years ago on this site and scrub has now invaded the grassland. The character of the remaining grassland has also altered but although it has become dominated by tor grass *Brachypodium pinnatum*, it retains a variety of other chalk grassland plants such as bird's-foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, marjoram *Origanum vulgare*, rock rose *Helianthemum chamaecistus* and salad burnet *Sanguisorba minor*. The combination of tor grass and herbs such as these form the habitat which supports the black-veined moth. The grassland also contains plants which are of particular interest such as the nationally scarce small bedstraw *Galium pumilum*, and man orchid *Aceras anthropophorum* along with Cypress spurge *Euphorbia cyparissias* which is scarce in Kent**. The colony of man orchids is one of the largest in Kent, numbering several hundred plants scattered between the grassland and the woodland edge.

The woodland edge contains beech *Fagus sylvatica*, yew *Taxus baccata* and whitebeam *Sorbus aria* forming an open tree canopy interspersed with areas of chalk grassland. Other plants which occur here are butcher's-broom *Ruscus aculeatus*, and orchids such as broad-leaved helleborine *Epipactis helleborine* and white helleborine *Cephalanthera damasonium*.

+ Red Data Book: 2 Insects, edited by D B Shirt 1987, NCC. Category 1: Endangered.

* Nationally scarce: recorded from 15–100 km squares in Britain.

** Scarce in Kent: recorded from between 11 and 52.4 km squares in Kent.