

File ref:

County: Devon **Site Name:** Haldon Forest

District: Teignbridge

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

Local Planning Authority: Devon County Council, Teignbridge District Council

National Grid Reference: SX 886838 **Area:** 1,013.2 (ha) 2,503.5 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 192, 191 **1:10,000:** SX 88 NE SE SX 98 SW

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

Date Notified Under 1981 Act): 1992 **Date of Last Revision:** –

Other Information:

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Haldon Forest supports an exceptional assemblage of breeding birds of prey, including several rare species, a nationally important population of breeding nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus** and rich communities of invertebrates, especially butterflies. In addition, the site incorporates two pockets of lowland heathland, a nationally-scarce and threatened wildlife habitat.

Situated on the Haldon ridge to the south of Exeter, at an altitude of 80–250 m, the Forest consists of a structurally diverse conifer plantation growing on a former heathland which is now reduced to a few small fragments. Broad-leaved trees are largely restricted to old hedge-banks and to the edges of ridges, some of which have been managed to provide suitable conditions for butterflies. Throughout the Forest the soils are freely draining, with a shallow peaty surface underlain by flinty gravel.

Six bird of prey species breed in the Forest: the nationally rare honey buzzard *Pernis apivorus*,* the nationally scarce goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*, hobby *Falco subbuteo*, sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*, buzzard *Buteo buteo* and kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*. In addition numerous migrating birds of prey are recorded each year from the Forest.

About 80 pairs of nightjar breed in the Forest, representing about 3% of the British population of this declining migratory species. Britain has a particular responsibility under the European Council Directive of 1979 on the conservation of wild birds to conserve the habitat of both this species and of honey buzzard. Other breeding bird species occurring within the Forest include crossbill *Luxia curvirostra* and siskin *Carduelis spinus*, both of which are numerous.

Carefully managed rides within the Forest support a rich community of butterflies. In all 35 species have been recorded, including the nationally-rare high brown fritillary *Fabriciana adippe*, a Red Data Book species, and three nationally-scarce ones, marsh fritillary *Eurodryas aurinia*, pear-bordered fritillary *Clossiana euphrosyne* and wood white *Leptidea sinapis*. The moth fauna is also diverse, with 277 species of larger moth *Macrolepidoptera* having been recorded, including the nationally-scarce dotted carpet *Alcis jubata*, pale pinion *Lithopane socia* and beautiful brocade *Lacanobia contigua*. Sixteen dragonfly species have been recorded, associated with small ponds and reservoirs throughout the Forest.

One of the remnant areas of heathland within the Forest, a 3.9 ha area at Harcombe, is important as a good representative example of a type of heathland now very

restricted in Devon. Characteristically, the heathland supports a few plant species, being dominated by a mosaic of bell heather *Erica cinerea*, western gorse *Ulex gallii* and heather *Calluna vulgaris* to the exclusion of nearly all other species other than mosses. Two other small remnants, near the service station on the A38 and at the southern end of the Harcombe Estate are more typical of lowland heathland in Devon containing cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix*, purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* and bristle bent *Agrostis curtisii* in addition to the above species. This latter type of heathland is, however, rarer nationally, being virtually restricted to south-west England.

* Species listed in Annex 1 of the EC Bird Directive.