

CITATION

COUNTY: DEVON SITE NAME: WHIDDON DEER PARK

DISTRICT: TEIGNBRIDGE & WEST DEVON

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

Local Planning Authority: WEST DEVON BOROUGH COUNCIL, Teignbridge District Council, Dartmoor National Park & Devon County Council

National Grid Reference: SX 725893 Area: 48.0 (ha.) 118.61 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 191 1:10,000: SX 78 NW

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

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

Other Information:

New site. Owned by the National Trust.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Whiddon Deer Park is a pasture woodland with an exceptionally diverse lichen flora and a rich invertebrate fauna. Many nationally-rare species are present.

Lying on the north-eastern edge of Dartmoor at an altitude of 130–240 metres, the park occupies the floor and steep west-facing slope of a valley above a stream feeding into the nearby River Teign. It is underlain by granite which outcrops frequently and has led to the formation of acid soils. These are mostly well drained but springs give rise to a few boggy flushes down the valley side.

Derived from and still retaining much of the original character of a medieval deer park, the site has many exceptionally large and old Oak *Quercus petraea*, Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and Beech *Fagus sylvatica* trees. Interspersed among these, unusually so for ancient pasture woodland, are many younger frees, mainly Oak, but including Birch *Betula* spp., Holly *Ilex aquifolium*, Willow *Salix* spp. and Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*. The ground flora is largely dominated by Fescue *Festuca* spp. and Bent *Agrostis* spp. grassland together with Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*. Rushes *Juncus* spp., Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* and Greater Tussock-sedge *Carex paniculata* occur in the flushes. The park is now grazed by cattle and sheep.

Altogether some 235 lichen species have been recorded from the park, 40 of these indicative of long-term ecological continuity, an exceptionally high number. The most diverse lichen communities occur on the ancient trees, especially Oak and Ash pollards, but the granite rocks also support a rich saxicolous flora. Overall the lichen flora is of particular interest because many of the species present are more typical of eastern Britain or the Continent. These include *Arthonia impolita*, *Chaenotheca brunneola*, *C. hispidula*,

Cyphelium inquinans and *Lecanactis lyncea*. However, some species characteristic of the high rainfall and oceanic conditions that prevail in Devon are also present, such as *Parmelia laevigata*, *Nephroma laevigatum*, *Lobaria pulmonaria* and *Sphaerophorum globosus*.

Ramonia nigra, which is known from only one other site in Britain, is among the many rare lichen species recorded. Others include *Schismatomma graphidioides*, *Lecania cyrtellina*, *Collema furfuraceum* and *Wadeana dendrographa*, and three species that are all very local in southwest England, *Anaptychia ciliaris*, *Lecanactis amylacea* and *Parmeliella plumbea*.

The park is unusual for a pasture woodland in also having an interesting moss flora. Primarily associated with old Ash trees, this flora includes two nationally scarce species, *Leucodon sciuroides* and *Zygodon baumgartneri*, and two that are uncommon in southern Britain, *Orthotrichum lyellii* and *Pterigonium gracile*.

The old trees support a rich community of insects, mainly associated with their dead wood. This community includes an endangered Red Data Book rove beetle, *Velleius dilatatus*, which lives on fly larvae in Hornet *Vespa crabro* nests. Another national rarity present is the long horn beetle *Strangalia aurulenta*, while nationally uncommon species recorded include a darkling beetle, *Eledona agricola*, a soldier beetle *Malthodes guttifer* and a bark bug *Xylocoris cursitans*. A woodland soldier fly, *Xylophagus ater*, is locally uncommon in England.

The wet flushes are also rich in invertebrates. The nationally uncommon Skullcap Leaf Beetle *Phyllobrotica quadrimaculata* has been found in them, as has the largest British slug, *Limax cinereoniger*, a very local species which is only found in ancient woods and pasture woodlands.