

County: Hampshire **Site Name:** Upper Greensand Hangers: Wyck to Wheatley SSSI

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

Local Planning Authority: Hampshire County Council, East Hampshire District Council

National Grid Reference: SU 752381 to SU 790395

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 186 **1:10,000:** SU 73 NE, SU 74 SE

Area: 12.72 (ha)

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 28 October 1999

Confirmed:

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Upper Greensand Hangers: Wyck to Wheatley SSSI comprises a series of steep, rocky woodlands on the escarpment of the Upper Greensand along the western edge of the Weald, near the town of Alton. The geology and landform of the Upper Greensand give rise to an unusual type of lime-rich (calcareous) woodland with natural rock exposures and characteristic vegetation, including many specialised bryophytes (mosses and liverworts) growing on the rocks. This calcareous, steep, rocky woodland is recognised as a habitat rare on a European scale and is also very limited in extent in Southern Britain.

The Upper Greensand is a sandstone which varies from soft sand to fairly hard rock (known as malmstone which is used locally for building) and is usually alkaline due to a high calcium carbonate (lime) content. Extensive outcrops of hard calcareous rock are not found elsewhere in the Weald but in East Hampshire the Upper Greensand forms a raised tract running north-south about 2 kilometres wide and over 20 kilometres long, deeply cut by many small stream valleys, falling away as an escarpment along its eastern edge. The steep slopes of the escarpment are generally not easily accessible to animals and are not easily cultivated and so have traditionally been managed as woodland. This continuity of management has allowed the development of a very diverse community of plants and animals.

The woodland canopy is mainly ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, with frequent common oak *Quercus robur* and field maple *Acer campestre*. Most of the woods have traditionally been managed as “coppice-with-standards”. Here multi-stemmed coppiced ash and maple are interspersed with oak and ash standards and occasional beech *Fagus sylvatica*, yew *Taxus baccata*, wild cherry *Prunus avium* and wych elm *Ulmus glabra*. Beneath the woodland canopy are shrubs, mainly hazel *Corylus avellana* but also elder *Sambucus nigra*.

The ground vegetation consists mainly of plants adapted to calcareous soil (calcicoles). Dog’s mercury *Mercurialis perennis* is the most prominent of these, growing with many other woodland plants such as yellow archangel *Lamiastrum galeobdolon*, wood woundwort *Stachys sylvatica*, lords-and-ladies *Arum maculatum*, wood avens *Geum urbanum*, primrose *Primula vulgaris*, broad buckler-fern *Dryopteris dilatata* and ivy *Hedera helix*. Where the soil is more neutral there is often abundant bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* and where it is damper, ramsons or wild garlic *Allium ursinum* forms carpets in the spring. There are many plants characteristic of ancient woodland, including early purple orchid *Orchis mascula*, herb Paris *Paris quadrifolia*, sweet woodruff *Galium odoratum* and wild daffodil *Narcissus pseudonarcissus*. Reynold’s Hanger is particularly species-rich, and supports several plants of

restricted distribution, including violet helleborine *Epipactis purpurata*, small teasel *Dipsacus pilosus* and the nationally scarce* Italian lords-and-ladies *Arum italicum* sub species *neglectum* at one of its northernmost native localities.

The exposed rock found throughout these woodlands forms a valuable habitat. Rock occurs most commonly as loose stones and boulders, often associated with small abandoned stone quarries or scattered on the woodland floor. The rocks are usually covered by carpets of bryophytes and because of the high calcium (lime) content of the rock these are generally lime-loving (calcicole) species such as *Tortula marginata*, *Chiloscyphus pallescens* and *Fissidens minutulus* var *tenuifolius*.

The invertebrate fauna of the woodland includes a population of the nationally scarce* mollusc *Macrogastera rolphii*.

* Nationally scarce species occur in 16–100 of 10 × 10km squares in Britain.