

County: Leicestershire

Site Name: Roecliffe Manor Lawns

District: Charnwood

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

Local Planning Authority: Leicestershire County Council
Charnwood Borough Council

National Grid Reference: SK 531125 **Area:** 1.28 (ha) 3.16 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet: 1:50,000: 129 1:10,000: SK 51 SW

Date notified (under 1981 Act): 2 October 2001

Reasons for notification

The site supports an unusually diverse community of fungi associated with old unimproved grassland, including a number of species listed in the provisional Red Data List for fungi which are restricted in their distribution in England to such habitats. This type of habitat and its associated rich fungal assemblage is a rare feature in Leicestershire and is generally scarce in the United Kingdom and across much of western Europe.

General description

Located on thin nutrient-poor soils overlying ancient Precambrian rocks of the Beacon Hill Formation, the site comprises a series of gently-sloping, closely mown and finely textured lawns within the grounds of Roecliffe Manor. It is one of the few sites in Leicestershire to contain this type of unimproved acid grassland together with a rich fungal assemblage. Its unusual character is largely attributable to its age, lack of agricultural improvement and low nutrient status, together with light grazing by rabbits supplementing a regular mowing regime.

The lawns comprise a short, moist, acidic turf characterised by fine-leaved grasses including sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina*, common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, red fescue *Festuca rubra* and sweet vernal grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, together with mat-grass *Nardus stricta*, heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens* and Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*. Distinctive herbs typical of such grassland communities, such as tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, mouse-ear hawkweed *Pilosella ofcinarum*, heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile*, heath milkwort *Polygala serpyllifolia*, bird's foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, field wood-rush *Luzula campestris* and sheep's sorrel *Rumex acetosella*, are also present in varying quantities. Heather *Calluna vulgaris* forms short but dense carpets whilst bryophytes are also a prominent component of the turf, particularly *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus*.

A particular feature of the site is the range of species of fungi characteristic of old unimproved grassland contained in the lawns immediately around the house. The community of grassland fungi also reflects subtle variations in soil nutrient status ranging from a lime-rich sward near the house to more acidic sheltered areas near the trees. In the autumn the most obvious fungi on display are the waxcap mushrooms *Hygrocybe*. This site supports a

high number of these species making it an outstanding example of unimproved grassland with a diverse fungi community. Some of the more spectacular but common waxcaps found on the site are typical of unimproved old grassland and include *Hygrocybe cantharellus*, a distinctive small red species, often with a scalloped cap common in wet acid grasslands; *H. coccinea*, a robust and sticky scarlet cap common in unfertilised pasture and lawns; *H. favipes*, a fungus with a grey cap which is an uncommon species found in unfertilised grassland and lawns and the parrot waxcap *H. psittacina*, which is easily recognised by its unique green colour and is associated with unimproved pastures, lawns and woodland glades. The uncommon *H. colemanniana* is also present and is more characteristic of limestone soils. The pink meadow cap *H. calyptriformis*, also occurs as part of this assemblage and is largely confined to such habitats in England.

Smaller specialist species of fungi present on the site, which are again closely associated with old grassland, include large numbers of *Entoloma* mushrooms, various genera of grassland fairy clubs or clavarioid fungi, and black ascomycete earth tongues. Notable species include the earth tongue *Trichoglossum hirsutum*, a small black fungus, and the spindle-shaped club fungus *Clavaria fumosa*, a whitish, simple fusiform which grows in dense tufts and is found in grasslands in open situations. The former presence of a large elm *Ulmus* spp. also contributes to the fungal community by supporting the numerous *Armillaria bulbosa* and indirectly by producing conditions favourable for *Camarophylloopsis* species and some *Entoloma* species.

Included in this diverse community of grassland fungi are five species included in the provisional Red Data List for fungi; *Clavulinopsis umbrinella*, *Camarophylloopsis stropuncta*, *C. foetens*, *Hygrocybe calyptriformis* and the pink gilled *Entoloma bloxamf*. All of these have a restricted distribution nationally and are strongly indicative of unfertilised grassland habitats.

Date notified: 2 October 2001
Grid reference: SK531125