

COUNTY: WEST SUSSEX

SITE NAME: CHANCTONBURY HILL

DISTRICT/BOROUGH: HORSHAM; WORTHING

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

Local Planning Authority: HORSHAM DISTRICT COUNCIL, Worthing Borough Council

National Grid Ref: TQ 143120

Area: 78.6 (ha.) 194.22 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 198

1:10,000: TQ 11 SW, SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1954

Date of Last Revision: 1980

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

The site lies within the South Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Reasons for Notification:

This site lies on the steep chalk escarpment of the South Downs and is dominated by a nationally uncommon woodland type. There are also areas of chalk grassland, another habitat that has a restricted distribution nationally. The site supports a rich community of breeding birds.

Chalk grassland has developed at this site over thin rendzina soils and is rich in flowering plants and associated invertebrate life. The woodland has developed on deeper soils at the foot of the escarpment but has now colonised much of the former grassland further up the slope. The maple variant of the calcareous pedunculate oak-ash-beech woodland type dominates the wood. Chalk scrub is well established in parts of the woodland and is scattered throughout the grassland. A dewpond at the site carries two of the three native British newts; one of these, the great crested newt *Triturus cristatus*, is specially protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

The dominant woodland trees are beech *Fagus sylvatica* and ash *Fraxinus excelsior* but pedunculate oak *Quercus robur*, field maple *Acer campestre*, coppiced hazel *Corylus avellana*, sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* and the occasional yew *Taxus baccata* also occur. Under the densest beech canopies the shrub and field layers are poorly developed but elsewhere there are rich plant communities; these include shrubs such as dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*, wild privet *Ligustrum vulgare*, wayfaring tree *Viburnum lantana* and elder *Sambucus nigra* above a field layer which is dominated by dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, ivy *Hedera helix* and enchanter's nightshade *Circaea lutetiana*.

The chalk grassland is of the sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina*-upright brome *Bromus erectus* type but tor grass *Brachypodium pinnatum* is dominant in places. Herbs found in the grassland include salad burnet *Sanguisorba minor*, yellow rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, marjoram *Origanum vulgare*, wild basil *Clinopodium vulgare*, toadflax *Linaria vulgaris* and harebell *Campanula rotundifolia*. Chalk scrub is scattered throughout the grassland and forms dense belts in places. The scrub consists of ash, elder, wayfaring tree, wild privet and hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*. Scrub and grassland support downland butterflies such as the chalk hill blue *Lysandra coridon*.

The site has records for over sixty species of breeding bird. These include downland species such as meadow pipit and corn bunting and woodland birds like green woodpecker, nuthatch and nightingale.