

COUNTY: SURREY SITE NAME: COMBE BOTTOM

DISTRICT: GUILDFORD

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

Local Planning Authority: GUILDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: TQ 063488      Area:    (ha.)    (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet: 1:50,000: 187      1:10,000: TQ 04 NE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1955      Date of Last Revision: 1975

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1988      Date of Last Revision: –

Further Information:

The boundary of this SSSI has been altered by several extensions and deletions.

Reasons for Notification:

This site contains an example of pedunculate oak/ash/beechness woodland (moist wych elm variant), a nationally uncommon stand type, located on the scarp slope of the North Downs. The steep slopes are formed from Upper and Middle Chalk overlain in some places by clay with flints, and are mostly covered by woodland and scrub, with a small relict area of unimproved chalk downland. There is an important stand of juniper scrub, while the site also supports a wide diversity of bryophytes (mosses and liverworts) including several locally rare species.

The mature woodland is dominated by beech *Fagus sylvatica* with a substantial number of yew *Taxus baccata*. A variety of other tree species occur, including ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, white beam *Sorbus aria*, pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* and wych elm *Ulmus glabra*. The sparse shrub layer includes holly *Ilex aquifolium* and privet *Ligustrum vulgare*. The ground flora varies with the amount of shade, and includes ivy *Hedera helix*, dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, giant fescue *Festuca gigantea*, white helleborine *Cephalanthera damasonium*, and hairy violet *Viola hirta*. There are also areas which have been planted with beech and sweet chestnut *Castanea sativa*. The woodlands provide a habitat for an unusually wide diversity of bryophytes, including the rare species *Herzogiella seligeri*, and the locally rare species *Cryphaea heteromalla*, *Encalypta vulgaris* and *Rhynchostegiella tenella* var. *litorea*.

On Juniper Hill there is a gradation from unimproved chalk grassland, through scrub to mature woodland. The scrub includes a number of specimens of juniper *Juniperus communis*, this site being one of the few areas of the North Downs where this species occurs. Other scrub species include hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and buckthorn *Rhamnus catharticus*. As the scrub grades into unimproved chalk grassland the sward is dominated by tor grass *Brachypodium pinnatum* and upright brome *Bromus erectus*, with autumn gentian *Gentianella amarella*, wild basil *Clinopodium vulgare*, horseshoe vetch *Hippocrepis comosa* and salad burnet *Poterium sanguisorba*.

Although the invertebrates at this site have been poorly studied it is known that the rare beetle *Prionocyphon serricornis* occurs here, as well as the uncommon slug *Limax tenellus*.