

COUNTY: WEST SUSSEX

SITE NAME: IPING COMMON

DISTRICT: CHICHESTER

Status: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Part of this site is a Local Nature Reserve (LNR)

Local Planning Authority: CHICHESTER DISTRICT COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: SU 856219                      Area: 124.6 (ha.) 307.9 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 197                      1:10,000: SU 82 SW, SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1954                      Date of Last Revision: 1980

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986                      Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

The site lies within the South Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This is 'A Nature Conservation Review' site.

Reasons for Notification:

This site includes Trotton, Iping and Stedham Commons as well as Fitzhall Heath. It is one of the richest examples of heathland remaining in West Sussex and is of particular interest for its invertebrate fauna which includes several rare spiders. The site is of county importance as a breeding site for heathland birds, and is the only site in Sussex for an uncommon species of grass.

As is typical of the Sussex commons, this heathland has developed on soils derived from the lower greensand. The majority of the heath is 'dry' although there are also smaller, wetter areas. Other habitats present include woodland, scrub, grassland and two ponds in the north of the site.

The site was extensively damaged by fire in 1976. Although much of the fauna was lost at the time, this has provided a rare opportunity to study the rate of heath recolonisation, and has particularly encouraged the regeneration of heather *Calluna vulgaris*.

The majority of the heath is dominated by heather and bell-heather *Erica cinerea* with dwarf gorse *Ulex minor* also present. Where drainage is impeded on north Trotton and part of Stedham Commons this dry heath grades into a wetter heathland type where an increase in cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix* and purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* is found. Where surface water is permanently present purple moor-grass becomes dominant with deer-grass *Trichophorum cespitosum* and heath rush *Juncus squarrosus* locally abundant. These areas of wet heath also support a rich moss flora which includes *Polytrichum commune*, *Sphagnum tenellum* and *Dicranum spurium*.

Grassland is mainly confined to the rides which cross the site. Creeping and common bent grasses, *Agrostis stolonifera* and *Agrostis capillaris* respectively, dominate drier areas; purple moor-grass and soft rush *Juncus effusus* on wetter areas. Iping Common is the only Sussex site for bristle bent grass *Agrostis curtisii*, a record not verified recently.

The site supports a rich invertebrate fauna. Prior to the fires of 1976 109 spider-species (Arachnida) had been recorded, including such notable rarities as *Centromerus aequalis* a species new to Britain, *Micaria silesiaca* and *Prosopotheca corniculans*. Amongst the butterflies there were important local populations of the silver-studded blue *Plebejus argus* and the grayling *Hipparchia semele*. The dragonflies *Odonata* were also well-represented.

The Commons are of county importance for breeding bird's; typical heathland species include nightjar and stonechat.