

COUNTY: WEST SUSSEX

SITE NAME: LEVIN DOWN

DISTRICT: CHICHESTER

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

Local Planning Authority: CHICHESTER DISTRICT COUNCIL

National Grid Ref: SU 886135

Area: 27.7 (ha.) 68.44 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 197

1:10,000: SU 81 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): –

Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1987

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:
This is a new site.

Reasons for Notification:

Levin Down is situated on the upper chalk of the South Downs, and comprises most of the south-facing slope of a small hill. It is an extremely good representative example of south-eastern chalk grassland, supporting a wide variety of herbs and grasses. The site also incorporates an area of chalk heath, which is a nationally rare habitat, and patches of juniper *Juniperus communis* scrub.

The short chalk turf is extremely rich in species. The most frequent grasses are fescues *Festuca* spp., among which grow characteristic downland species such as autumn gentian *Gentianella amarella*, autumn lady's tresses *Spiranthes spiralis*, salad burnet *Sanguisorba minor*, the rare round-headed rampion *Phyteuma tenerum*, eyebright *Euphrasia officinalis* and quaking grass *Briza media*. Glaucous sedge *Carex flacca* is frequent and spring sedge *C. caryophyllea* also occurs.

In other areas of ranker false-brome *Brachypodium sylvaticum*-dominated grassland, taller herbs including agrimony *Agrimonia eupatoria* and wild parsnip *Pastinaca sativa* are abundant within the sward, together with false oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius* and cocksfoot grass *Dactylis glomerata*.

Within the north-eastern part of the site, a small area of chalk heath has developed where species more typical of acidic conditions, such as heather *Calluna vulgaris*, tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, and heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile* grow amongst the chalk downland plants.

Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* scrub is invading large areas of the site, although rich chalk grassland patches can still be found within many of these areas. The scrub provides additional wildlife habitat within the site, and component species include ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, hazel *Corylus avellana*, bramble *Rubus fruticosus* and travellers joy *Clematis vitalba*. In south-western areas the scrub consists mainly of juniper *Juniperus communis*, together with yew *Taxus baccata* and holly *Ilex aquifolium*. The juniper colony here is one of the largest in Sussex, and supports a number of juniper – specific insects, including the shieldbug *Cyphostethus tristriatus* and the seed chalcid *Megastigmus bipunctatus*, both of which are indicators of a healthy juniper colony. A variety of species of butterfly can be found on the Down, including small blue *Cupido minimus* and chalk-hill blue *Lysandra coridon*.