

COUNTY: WEST SUSSEX

SITE NAME: WEST DEAN WOODS

DISTRICT: CHICHESTER

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

Local Planning Authority: CHICHESTER DISTRICT COUNCIL

National Grid Ref: SU 847156

Area: 17.3 (ha.) 42.7 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 197

1:10,000: SU 81 NW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1980

Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

This site is a reserve of the Sussex Trust for Nature Conservation. It is in the South Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Reasons for Notification:

West Dean Woods is the best known West Sussex example of a lowland pedunculate oak-hazel wood on Upper Chalk. There is a rich field layer of flowering plants and the site supports several uncommon invertebrates.

The woodland has a recorded history dating from the sixteenth century. The long continuity of woodland cover is demonstrated by the deep, undisturbed forest soils which overlie the Upper Chalk, and by the presence of 'old forest' epiphytic bryophytes (mosses and liverworts) and lichens. In addition to the rich woodland field layer open glades and rides also support a diversity of flowering plants. Variation in woodland height, cover and composition promotes valuable populations of breeding birds and invertebrates.

The wood consists of standards of pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* above coppiced hazel *Corylus avellana*. Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* is scattered throughout the wood but silver birch *Betula pendula* and field maple *Acer campestre* are more restricted. Holly *Ilex aquifolium*, dogwood *Cornus sanguinea* and goat willow *Salix caprea* form an intermittent shrub layer. The ground flora varies with the current state of management but is often rich: dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and enchanter's nightshade *Circaea lutetiana* are dominant in the south of the wood while bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and bramble *Rubus fruticosus* occur on deeper soils in the north. The large colony of wild daffodil *Narcissus pseudonarcissus* is of particular note and other unusual species found in the wood include white helleborine *Cephalanthera damasonium*, fly orchid *Ophrys insectifera*, and toothwort *Lathraea squamaria*. Thirty five bryophytes have been recorded, many of which are epiphytic on oak and ash. The lichen flora is rich with species such as *Pachyphiale cornea*, *Catillaria atropurpurea*, *Arthonia didyma* and *Calicium salicinum*. West Dean Woods is the only known locality east of Devon for the lichen *Lobaria scrobiculata*. Beard lichens *Usnea* species are particularly well established.

The rides and glades support a variety of flowering plants including nettle-leaved bellflower *Campanula trachelium*, betony *Stachys officinalis*, herb robert *Geranium robertianum*, giant fescue *Festuca gigantea* and yellow pimpernel *Lysimachia nemorum*. Sallow *Salix cinerea* and birch scrub line the rides in places.

Over thirty species of bird are known to breed in the wood including tawny owl, cuckoo and woodcock. The rides and glades are particularly important for butterflies and notable species recorded include pearl bordered fritillary, purple hairstreak, purple emperor and white letter hairstreak. Two rare species of hoverfly associated with dead wood *Cheilosa carbonaria* and *Cheilosa nigripes* occur in the woods.