



trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* and lesser knapweed *Centaurea nemoralis*. These areas, mainly on south facing slopes, provide valuable nectar sources for insects.

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Much of the plateau and north and west-facing slopes are covered with dense or scattered hawthorn-dominated scrub which has developed as a result of the decimation of the rabbit population by myxomatosis in the early 1950s, combined with periods when no stock grazing took place. The plateau scrub, which contains a certain amount of gorse, is gradually developing into pedunculate oak woodland where it is not being controlled for bird census work. On the slopes whitebeam, buckthorn, elder and blackthorn add diversity to the dominant hawthorn. In areas where scrub has been cut recently, false brome *Brachypodium sylvaticum* persists in a somewhat impoverished ground flora. The succession from open grassland through open and closed scrub to incipient woodland provides habitat for a wide range of insectivorous breeding birds including meadow pipit, lesser redpoll, reed bunting and several species of warbler, while the scattered whitebeam on Steps Hill provides resting posts and food for passage migrants which include ring ouzel.

There are two areas of ancient woodland. Clipper Down Wood is a calcareous beech wood with much ash and whitebeam and containing spurge laurel *Daphne laureola*, goldilocks buttercup *Ranunculus auricomus* and wood barley *Hordelymus europaeus*, characteristic of old woodland. The Coombe is moist woodland lying on Middle Chalk with Valley Gravel occurring on the lower level. Beech is locally dominant, elsewhere the mixed woodland contains ash and sycamore with scattered mature beech. There is an understorey of elder and hawthorn and a ground flora dominated by male-fern *Dryopteris filix-mas*, nettle *Urtica dioica* and bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, with a local occurrence of wood small-reed *Calamagrostis epigejos*. There are many open gaps where the rotting logs of fallen trees, especially ash, support a rich bryophyte flora, the most interesting being the sub-alpine liverwort *Riccardia palmata* and the fen moss *Climacium dendroides*. On the west margin of the wood a series of wooded strips of uneven length run westwards into the grassland. Composed of a mixture of beech, ash, hawthorn and elder, three of these have a dense understorey of box *Buxus sempervirens*. The origin of these is uncertain, but it is thought that they may have formed part of an old rabbit warren. The wood supports a good range of breeding birds and a large population of fallow deer.

The site includes a small area of arable land at the north-east end (Gallows Hill) which has been ploughed since notified in 1951. This has been retained within the SSSI because of an interesting population of arable weeds which are becoming nationally scarce. These include narrow-fruited cornsalad *Valerianella dentata*, fine-leaved fumitory *Fumaria parviflora*, Venus's looking-glass *Legousia hybrida*, hard poa *Desmazeria rigida* and long headed poppy *Papaver dubium*.