

County: North Yorkshire

Site Name: Scoska Wood

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

Local Planning Authority: Yorkshire Dales National Park, (Craven District Council)

National Grid Reference: SD 915725

Area: 68.9 (ha) 170.3 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 98

1:10,000: SD 97 SW

First Notified: 1975*

Date of Revision: 1986

Description:

The name Scoska Wood is applied to a site comprising both woodland and pasture situated on the northeast facing slope of Littondale between Litton and Arncliffe. The underlying Carboniferous Limestone has a major influence on the flora. Woodland clings to the limestone scars and upper slopes, and grades into herb-rich neutral or calcareous pasture below; at which boundary a number of springs emerge, giving rise to flush communities.

The woodland canopy is dominated by ash *Fraxinus excelsior* with an understorey of hazel *Corylus avellana* and hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*; sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*, downy birch *Betula pubescens* and bird cherry *Prunus padus* also occur. There is a rich ground flora, dominated locally by tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa*, and containing herbs such as dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, ramsons *Allium ursinum*, sanicle *Sanicula europaea* and herb paris *Paris quadrifolia*. The limestone scar and scree which is exposed along the mid-level of the wood supports a number of ferns including maidenhair spleenwort *Asplenium trichomanes* and hard shield-fern *Polystichum aculeatum*, as well as the local baneberry *Actaea spicata*.

Towards the pasture edge, where the canopy opens, a tall-herb community has developed containing wood crane's-bill *Geranium sylvaticum*, melancholy thistle *Cirsium helenioides* and meadow sweet *Filipendula ulmaria*. On the slopes below, the pasture consists of two community types: one is a sward of sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and common bent grass *Agrostis capillaris* with herbs such as tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis* and notable for its populations of bird's-eye primrose *Primula farinosa*; the other contains purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* with tawny sedge *Carex hostiana* and, typically, great burnet *Sanguisorba officinalis*. A third grassland type occurs on the thin limestone soils above the crags or on the steeper upper slopes, and is characterised by the presence of blue sesleria *Sesleria albicans* and a range of calcareous herbs including salad burnet *Sanguisorba minor* and fairy flax *Linum catharticum*.

Flush communities at the wood/pasture boundary are particularly species-rich with, for example, fragrant orchid *Gymnadenia conopsea*, broad-leaved cotton-grass *Eriophorum latifolium*, grass of Parnassus *Parnassia palustris*, marsh arrowgrass *Triglochin palustris*, marsh valerian *Valeriana dioica* and bird's-eye primrose.

The cool and moist conditions and the resultant woodland flora of this site contrast strongly with those of the drier south-west facing slopes of Hawkswick Wood SSSI on the other side of the dale.

Other Information:

1. This is a nationally important site listed in 'A Nature Conservation Review' edited by D. A. Ratcliffe (1977). Cambridge University Press.
2. During the 1985 revision the boundary has been extended.

*Under Section 23 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949.