

**Site name:** Ebernoe Common

**County:** West Sussex

**District:** Chichester

**Status:** Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under section 28C of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as inserted by Schedule 9 to the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

**Local Planning Authority:** Chichester District Council

**National Grid reference:** SU 976 271

**Area:** 234.05ha

**Ordnance Survey sheet: 1:50,000:** 186 & 197

**1:10,000:** SU 92 NE

**Date notified:** 21 November 2003

### **Reasons for notification:**

Ebernoe Common is of national importance as an example of a large ancient woodland. It contains a wide range of structural and vegetation community types which have been influenced in their development by differences in the underlying soils and past management. The native trees, particularly those with old growth characteristics, support rich lichen and fungal communities, and a diverse woodland breeding bird assemblage. Nationally important maternity roosts for barbastelle bat *Barbastella barbastellus* and Bechstein's bat *Myotis bechsteinii* occur within the woodland.

### **General description:**

Ebernoe Common is a complex of ancient woodland blocks largely derived from ancient wood pasture. The northern and southern sections of the site contain woodland managed as high forest in more recent times. The site also contains 78 of the 100 ancient woodland indicator plants for south-eastern England.

### **Closed High Forest**

The most extensive woodland type is closed canopy beech *Fagus sylvatica* high forest with some oak *Quercus robur*, which occupies the central and western plateau of Ebernoe and Colhook Commons (predominantly National Vegetation Classification (NVC) W14 *Fagus sylvatica*-*Rubus fruticosus* woodland and W15 *Fagus sylvatica*-*Deschampsia flexuosa* woodland). Holly *Ilex aquifolium* forms a dense understorey with scattered yew *Taxus baccata*. Beneath the closed beech canopy the ground flora is virtually absent, but where canopy gaps occur the flora reflects local variations in the degree of acidity and drainage of the silty soil. A large number of plants indicative of ancient woodlands occur, including wood melick *Melica uniflora*, thin-spiked wood sedge *Carex strigosa*, yellow pimpernel *Lysimachia nemorum* and wood millet *Milium effusum*.

A series of predominantly oak/ash woods with hazel *Corylus avellana* understorey managed as high forest lie within the southern section of Ebernoe Common (predominantly NVC W8 *Fraxinus excelsior*-*Acer campestre*-*Mercurialis perennis* woodland and W10a *Quercus robur*-*Pteridium aquilinum*-*Rubus fruticosus* woodland). Bittles Field, lying on the slopes of a narrow stream valley, contains particularly fine examples of mature oaks.

At the northern end of the site are Kiln Copse, Mercers Copse and a series of smaller copses, all predominantly oak high forest with ash-rich woodland on valley slopes (predominantly NVC W8 *Fraxinus excelsior-Acer campestre-Mercurialis perennis* woodland and W10a *Quercus robur-Pteridium aquilinum-Rubus fruticosus* woodland). The ground flora is dominated by bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* with abundant wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa* in some parts. Other ancient woodland indicator species present include wild service tree *Sorbus torminalis*, butchers broom *Ruscus aculeatus*, yellow archangel *Lamium galeobdolon*, hairy wood-rush *Luzula pilosa*, and southern wood-rush *L. forsteri*.

In the north and east of Ebernoe Common, oak is co-dominant with beech in a more open high forest with abundant holly. This area is predominantly NVC W8 *Fraxinus excelsior-Acer campestre-Mercurialis perennis* woodland, W10a *Quercus robur-Pteridium aquilinum-Rubus fruticosus* woodland, and W14 *Fagus sylvatica-Rubus fruticosus* woodland. In the south-eastern end of this block outcrops of "Paludina" limestone give rise to base rich soils occupied by a less mature woodland of field maple *Acer campestre*, oak, hazel and ash. Spindle *Euonymus europaeus* is present and the ground flora includes early purple orchid *Orchis mascula* and greater butterfly orchid *Platanthera chlorantha*. Wild service tree is a frequent component in the oak-hazel woodland of Willand Wood and two other uncommon species, butcher's broom and wild daffodil *Narcissus pseudonarcissus* occur throughout this wood.

### **Wood Pasture**

In the south, Hoads Common is ancient wood pasture, which although not grazed for many years, retains elements of a wood pasture structure, with old pedunculate oak and beech, including a few pollards, scrub, and open glades. The greater part consists of oak woodland, with dense and frequently impenetrable holly dominating the understorey. At the northern end beech is dominant with very tall mature trees. It is predominantly NVC W10a *Quercus robur-Pteridium aquilinum-Rubus fruticosus* woodland and W14 *Fagus sylvatica-Rubus fruticosus* woodland.

### **Lichens**

Ebernoe Common supports a nationally important assemblage of lichen species (over 100), the largest recorded number found in woodland over Weald Clay, including several which are closely associated with ancient woodland such as *Catillaria atropurpurea* and *Stenocybe septata*. The lichen assemblage includes four Red Data Book species, *Agonimia octospora*, *Micarea pycnidiphora*, *Pertusaria pustulata* and *Ramonia chrysophaea* as well as one nationally rare species, 12 nationally scarce species, and 20 species listed on the New Index of Ecological Continuity.

### **Fungi**

The site also supports a nationally important assemblage of fungi including seven Red Data Book species: oak polypore *Buglossoporus pulvinus*, spine-face *Creolophus* (= *Hericium*) *cirrhatus*, coral spine-face *Hericium coralloides*, pink meadow waxcap *Hygrocybe calyptriformis*, *Collybia racemosa*, *Coriolopsis gallica* and *Cortinarius cyanopus*. These are species particularly associated with ancient woodland and wood pasture with a significant dead wood resource.

## Woodland breeding bird assemblage

Ebernoe Common supports a nationally important assemblage of woodland breeding birds of over 20 species which includes sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*, buzzard *Buteo buteo*, woodcock *Scolopax rusticola*, stock dove *Columba oenas*, cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*, tawny owl *Strix aluco*, green woodpecker *Picus viridis*, great spotted woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*, lesser spotted woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*, nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*, garden warbler *Sylvia borin*, blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*, chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*, goldcrest *Regulus regulus*, spotted flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*, long-tailed tit *Aegithalos caudatus*, marsh tit *Parus palustris*, willow tit *Parus montanus*, coal tit *Parus ater*, nuthatch *Sitta europaea*, treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*, jay *Garrulus glandarius*, bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*, and hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*.

## Bats

Ebernoe Common is of national importance for colonies of barbastelle and Bechstein's bats, which use trees as summer maternity roosts where the female bats gather to give birth and rear their young. The bats also use the site as a foraging area and as flight paths for dispersal to their foraging territories both within and outside of the SSSI.

In addition to the reasons for notification, thirty three species of butterfly have been recorded from the across the site, including purple emperor *Apatura iris*, brown hairstreak *Thecla betulae*, grizzled skipper *Pyrgus malvae*, and dingy skipper *Erynnis tages*. Stag beetles *Lucanus cervus* have also been recorded and their presence is indicative of a significant wood pasture invertebrate interest. A total of eleven other bat species have been recorded from the site, including Brandt's bat *Myotis brandtii*, whiskered bat *Myotis mystacinus*, Leisler's bat *Nyctalus leisleri*, and grey long-eared bat *P. austriacus*.

## Other information

- Part of the site is a National Nature Reserve owned by Sussex Wildlife Trust declared under section 35 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.

Ebernoe Common is listed in *A Nature Conservation Review* (NCR) (Ratcliffe, 1977).