

COUNTY: SOMERSET

SITE NAME: CHEDDAR WOOD

DISTRICT: SEDGEMOOR

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

Local Planning Authority: Somerset County Council, Sedgemoor District Council

National Grid Reference: ST 445552                      Area: 86.9 (ha) 214.7 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 182                      1:10,000: ST 45 NW, SW, NE, SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1967                      Date of Last Revision: 1972

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1987                      Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Site boundary extended. Cheddar Wood lies within the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Part managed by the Somerset Trust for Nature Conservation.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

This site comprises a wide range of habitats which includes ancient and secondary semi-natural broadleaved woodland, unimproved neutral grassland and a complex mosaic of calcareous grassland and acidic dry dwarf-shrub heath. Three of the woodland types, as well as the calcareous grassland/acidic dry dwarf-shrub heath mosaic, have a restricted distribution in Britain. Two nationally rare plant species are also present. Additional interest lies in the invertebrate fauna.

Cheddar Wood lies on steep south facing Carboniferous Limestone slopes of the Mendip Hills. Surface outcrops of limestone are common, but soils reach a depth of 25cms in places. Well drained soils of the Crwbin association predominate in the wooded areas. The soils of Callow Hill are more complex. Here superficial deposits of acidic material derived from windblown loess overlie an irregular surface of calcareous material, resulting in a mosaic of deep acid soils and shallow neutral to calcareous soils.

Cheddar Wood is an ancient woodland site stocked with coppice consisting of Small-leaved Lime *Tilia cordata*, Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur* and Hazel *Corylus avellana*. Field Maple *Acer campestre* occurs throughout in small quantities, while Whitebeam *Sorbus aria*, Yew *Taxus baccata*, Wych Elm *Ulmus glabra* and Wild Service-tree *Sorbus torminalis* are less common. Three woodland types can be distinguished: (i) Ash-Field Maple, (ii) Calcareous Pedunculate Oak-Hazel-Ash, (iii) Pedunculate Oak-Ash-Small-leaved Lime. The latter type has a very restricted distribution and Cheddar Wood provides one of the best and most extensive British examples. Shrubs present include Wayfaring-tree *Viburnum lantana*, Dogwood *Cornus sanguinea* and Spindle *Euonymus europaeus*.

The ground flora is varied, with Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, Dog's Mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and Wood Anemone *Anemone nemorosa* abundant over most of the wood. Flushed slopes are dominated by Ramsons *Allium ursinum*. Other plants present include Columbine *Aquilegia vulgaris*, Meadow Saffron *Colchicum autumnale*, Lily-of-the-Valley *Convallaria majalis*, Wild Daffodil *Narcissus pseudonarcissus*, Toothwort *Lathraea squamaria* and four species of orchid: Common Spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, Early-purple Orchid *Orchis mascula*, Greater Butterfly-orchid *Plantanthera chlorantha* and Bird's-nest Orchid *Neottia nidus-avis*.

Significant changes in the size of the wood have occurred during the last 200 years. Extensive areas of secondary woodland have extended upslope from the bank marking the

northern boundary of the wood on to Callow Hill. Pedunculate Oak, Ash and Hazel are the most common species with some Whitebeam, Hawthorn *Crateagus monogyna* and Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*. In contrast, the south-eastern and south-western boundaries of Cheddar Wood used to extend to the sunken, hedged lanes, but asserting of the lower ground in the late 18th Century resulted in the formation of a series of small fields separated by hedges which are characterised by an abundance of Small-leaved Lime.

Some of these enclosures have reverted to scrub, but others support unimproved neutral grassland communities of the False-Oat-grass – Common Knapweed type. False Oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*, Cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata* and Yorkshire Fog *Holcus lanatus* are the most common grasses. Herbs are abundant and include Common Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, Wild Basil *Clinopodium vulgare*, Wild Carrot *Daucus carota*, Field Scabious *Knautia arvensis*, Musk Mallow *Malva moschata* and Marjoram *Origanum vulgare*.

Callow Hill supports a complex mosaic of unimproved calcareous grassland and acidic dry dwarf-shrub heath. The grassland community is dominated by Meadow Oat-grass *Avenula pratensis* and Sheep's Fescue *Festuca ovina*. Spring Sedge *Carex caryophyllea* and Glaucous Sedge *C. flacca* are abundant and herbs include Dwarf Thistle *Cirsium acaule*, Dropwort *Filipendula vulgaris*, Common Rock-Rose *Helianthemum nummularium* and Wild Thyme *Thymus praecox*. Heath species such as Heather *Calluna vulgaris*, Bell Heather *Erica cinerea* and Western Gorse *Ulex gallii* are well represented.

Cheddar Wood is the only English station for Starved Wood-sedge *Carex depauperata*. The nationally rare Purple Gromwell *Lithospermum purpurocaeruleum* is also present. Butterflies include Silver-washed Fritillary *Argynnis paphia*, Dark Green Fritillary *A. aglaja*, Pearl-bordered Fritillary *Boloria euphrosyne*, Holly Blue *Celastrina argiolus* and Brown Argus *Aricia agestis*. The slug *Arion fasciatus*, which has a restricted distribution in the south of England, and the beetle *Cantharis fusca* also occur.

Site notified to Secretary of State on 27 March 1987.