

COUNTY: SOMERSET SITE NAME: EDFORD WOODS & MEADOWS

DISTRICT: MENDIP

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, Mendip District Council

National Grid Reference: ST 665485 Area: 54.3 (ha.) 134.1 (ac.)
 ST 675488
 ST 678480

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 183 1:10,000: ST 64 NE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): – Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1992 Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

A new site.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

This site is important for the occurrence of a wide range of types of semi-natural ancient woodland and for unimproved meadows and pastures of a type which is now uncommon in Britain.

The site is located in the Mendip Hills in the narrow valley of the Mells Stream. The geological strata underlying most of the site are Carboniferous Coal Measures which in this locality are shales on which clay-rich soils have developed. There is an outcrop of Carboniferous quartzite in Hurdlestone Wood and Carboniferous limestone outcrops in both Hurdlestone and Bector Woods.

Most of the woodlands on this site are dominated by Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, with frequent Alder *Alnus glutinosa* in wetter parts. Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur* and Sessile Oak *Q. petraea* occur occasionally as maiden trees, whereas most of the Ash and Alder has been coppiced in the past. The shrub layer has abundant Hazel *Corylus avellana* much of which has also been coppiced. The ground flora is luxuriant, very species-rich and includes a large number of species normally found only in ancient woodlands. The diversity of species is enhanced by the transition from very wet soils in the valley bottom to dry, well drained ground on the upper slopes and by a variation in soil acidity, following the change in geological strata.

The Mells Stream flows through Edford Wood and on the river banks Monk's-hood *Aconitum napellus*, a nationally scarce plant, grows in abundance. Other species characteristic of the wetter areas in these woods are Wild Daffodil *Narcissus pseudonarcissus*, Snowdrop *Galanthus nivalis*, Ramsons *Allium ursinum*, Tufted Hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa* and Water Avens *Geum rivale*. On the better

drained ground there is abundant Dog's Mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and Wood Anemone *Anemone nemorosa* and the associated species includes Herb Paris *Paris quadrifolia*, Solomon's-seal *Polygonatum multiflorum*, Meadow Saffron *Colchicum autumnale*, Wood Vetch *Vicia sylvatica*, Early-purple Orchid *Orchis mascula* and Toothwort *Lathraea squamaria*. In Hurdlestone Wood the quartzite outcrop gives rise to more acidic, nutrient poor soils and here Greater Wood-rush *Luzula sylvatica* occurs in abundance under a canopy which includes Sessile Oak, Downy Birch *Betula pubescens* and Alder, a highly unusual feature in a Mendip woodland.

The meadows and pastures are all located on Carboniferous shales. The sward is characterised by frequent Crested Dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus* and a variety of other grasses including Quaking-grass *Briza media*, Downy Oat-grass *Avenula pubescens* and Yellow Oat-grass *Trisetum flavescens*. These grasslands contain a high cover and diversity of herb species; particularly abundant in the meadows are: Cowslip *Primula veris*, Pignut *Conopodium majus*, Yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, Betony *Stachys officinalis*, Common Knapweed *Centaurea nigra* and the nationally scarce Corky-fruited Water-dropwort *Oenanthe pimpinelloides*. The presence of species such as Green-winged Orchid *Orchis morio*, Bitter-vetch *Lathyrus montanus*, Dyer's Greenweed *Genista tinctoria*, Twayblade *Listera ovata* and Heath Spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza maculata* is further evidence of the unimproved nature of the sward.