

COUNTY: EAST SUSSEX SITE NAME: ERIDGE PARK

DISTRICT: WEALDEN

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

Local Planning Authority: WEALDEN DISTRICT COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: TQ 576344 Area: 390.1 (ha.) 963.9 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 188 1:10,000: TQ 53 NE, SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1966 Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986 Date of Last Revision: –

Further Information:

This site was formerly known as Saxonbury Hill and Eridge Park and is described in a Nature Conservation Review. This site also includes Nap Wood, a nature reserve owned by the National Trust and managed by the Sussex Trust for Nature Conservation.

Reasons for Notification:

This site comprises parkland and adjacent ancient woodland on the lower Tunbridge Wells Sandstone and underlying Wadhurst Clay. It has one of the richest epiphytic lichen floras of any single park in Britain. The variety of habitats present also support diverse insect and bird communities.

The woodlands of Saxonbury Hill and Nap Wood lie on Tunbridge Wells Sandstone and contain a mixture of stand types. Sessile oak *Quercus petraea*, and pedunculate oak *Q. robur* are frequently associated with beech *Fagus sylvatica* to form a high forest with bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* dominating the ground flora. Many local variations occur with hazel *Corylus avellana*, ash *Fraxinus excelsior* or birch *Betula* spp. as co-dominants. In Rocks Wood there is an area of coppiced sweet chestnut *Castanea sativa* and small plantations of beech or conifers are also present.

In Nap Wood beech gives way to birch *Betula pendula* and *B. pubescens* in association with oak; holly *Ilex aquifolium*, rowan *Sorbus aucuparia* and yew *Taxus baccata* are also present. The ground flora is richer and includes three-nerved sandwort *Moehringia trinervia* and wood sorrel *Oxalis acetosella* with yellow pimpernel *Lysimachia nemorum*, bugle *Ajuga reptans* and enchanters nightshade *Circaea lutetiana* on damper soils.

Further north is the open woodland of Eridge Old Park on steep south facing slopes. Many of the ancient oaks, beeches, birches, ashes and field maples *Acer campestre* have a notable lichen flora. The ground layer is predominantly bracken and bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg., although acidic marshy grassland with purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* is found along the seepage zone where the sandstone overlies clay.

On the plateau above there are remnants of a dry heath community with heather *Calluna vulgaris*, bell heather *Erica cinerea*, bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* and gorse *Ulex* spp. Streams dissect the site exposing the Wadhurst Clay, and in places they have been dammed to form a series of ornamental ponds. Alder *Alnus glutinosa* woods with hazel, ash and alder buckthorn *Frangula alnus* occupy the valley bottoms and wetter flushes above. Here the ground flora reflects the damper base-rich conditions and contains wood avens *Geum urbanum*, marsh woundwort *Stachys palustris*, opposite-leaved golden saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* and a range of sedges and rushes.

The site as a whole, woodland and parkland, is of national importance for its lichens, with 167 recorded species, many of which are characteristic of old forests, including *Parmeliella plumbea* and *Nephroma laevigatum*. The epiphytic bryophytes *Frullania fragilifolia* and *Orthotrichum stramineum* are also present here at their only known south-eastern locality.

In Rocks Wood there is a small sandrock outcrop which offers a rare habitat for a range of uncommon ferns and bryophytes including the hay-scented buckler fern *Dryopteris aemula*, Tunbridge filmy fern *Hymenophyllum tunbridgense* and the liverworts *Scapania gracilis* and *Bazzania trilobata*.

This wide range of habitats also supports a rich fauna particularly invertebrates and birds. The site is considered nationally important for dragonflies with 22 species recorded including the notable brilliant emerald *Somatochlora metallica*. It contains the only remaining East Sussex colony of the high brown fritillary *Argynnis adippe*, as well as the white letter hairstreak *Strymonidia w-album*. The bog bush cricket *Metrioptera brachyptera* is present in large numbers and there are a great variety of water beetles.

The breeding bird community is also important; 60 species are known to breed here including hobby, redstart, water rail and all 3 British woodpeckers. The site also contains a heronry.