

COUNTY: BUCKINGHAMSHIRE **SITE NAME:** ELLESBOROUGH AND KIMBLE WARRENS

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

Local Planning Authorities: Wycombe District Council

National Grid Reference: SP831058

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 165 **1:10,000:** SP80 NW and SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1953 **Date of Last Revision:** 1982

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1984 **Date of Last Revision:**

Area: 68.9 ha 170.2 ac

Other information: Described in 'A Nature Conservation Review' (Ellesborough Warren). Part of the SSSI is managed as a nature reserve by the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Naturalists Trust. It falls entirely within the Chilterns AONB.

Description and Reasons for Notification

Part of the Chiltern escarpment here deeply incised by three valleys: Ellesborough, Great and Little Kimble 'Warrens'. The vegetation comprises deciduous woodland, of which some is developing, but most is overmature; dense scrub, including abundant box *Buxus sempervirens*, here thought to be native; and both grazed and ungrazed chalk grasslands, of which some are species-rich and contain both local and national rarities. Mixed scrub is invading some of these grasslands. One of the valleys harbours an unusual sedge-fen community. The site contains one of the richest assemblages of calcicolous bryophytes in the Chilterns, and is notable for its range of invertebrates as well as its overwintering and breeding bird populations.

The mature woodlands are mainly of beech and sycamore with ash, Norway maple and horse chestnut and occasional Scot's pine. The understorey is sometimes purely of box, but otherwise includes field maple, privet and other chalk scrub species; curiously, yew is virtually absent. Most of the larger species, as well as walnut *Juglans regia* and hornbeam *Carpinus betulus*, also occur as parkland trees. Areas of younger woodland occur with, unusually for chalk, birch *Betula pendula* dominant, and ash and sycamore as associates. Here the ground flora is more reminiscent of downland, but with bugle *Ajuga reptans* a conspicuous component.

Box occurs more widely as dense scrub. It is regenerating naturally, and the Warrens are thought to represent one of only three native localities in Britain. Privet and elder *Sambucus nigra* are typical associates, and on the steeper slopes of loose chalk scree an open, herbaceous community persists among the bushes, often with viper's bugloss *Echium vulgare*. The rare lichen *Catillaria bouteillii* is associated with the box. Invertebrate interest centres on box-specific insects (such as the bug *Psylla buxi*), but extends to the beechwoods which are known to be especially rich in spiders. Notable butterflies include white-letter hairstreak *Strymonidia w-album* and Duke of Burgundy *Hamearis lucina*, as well as chalk-hill blue *Lysandra coridon*. The grassland also supports a population of the local chalkland snail *Abida secale*. The ranker grasslands are dominated by tall oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius* with herbs such as wild parsnip *Pastinaca sativa*. The grazed sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina* grasslands contain numerous species including crested hairgrass *Koeleria macrantha*, rockrose *Helianthemum nummularia*, wild thyme *Thymus praecox* and stonecrop *Sedum acre*, the last associated particularly with rabbit scrapes. Notable plants include squinancywort *Asperula cynanchica*, chalk eyebright *Euphrasia pseudokernerii* and, in its only Buckinghamshire locality, musk orchid *Herminium monorchis*. The bryophyte flora is rich on the north and east-facing slopes. Scrub which is invading the grasslands includes a typical range of chalkland species, as well as birch and occasional holm and pedunculate oaks *Quercus ilex* and *Q. robur*. Deadly nightshade *Atropa belladonna* is unusually abundant.