

COUNTY: SOMERSET      SITE NAME: WALTON AND IVYTHORN HILLS

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 475346      Area: 34.9 (ha.) 86.1 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 182      1:10,000: ST 43 NE, ST 43 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1953      Date of Last Revision: 1972

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

Other Information:

Site area reduced since last Revision. Owned and managed by the National Trust.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Walton and Ivythorn Hills support a complex mosaic of semi-natural habitats which includes unimproved calcareous grassland, dense and scattered scrub and broadleaved woodland. Additional interest lies in the occurrence of a number of invertebrate species with a local distribution in Somerset.

Walton and Ivythorn Hills are situated at the south-eastern end of the Polden Hills, reaching 80m ODN at their highest point. The geology of the area is complex. Lower Lias clays, Rhaetic clays and Keuper Marl strata are present. Brown calcareous soils of the Somerton Series have developed on the flatter hill-tops. Heavy clays and rendzinas of the Hurcot Complex occur on the steep slopes and most of Ivythorn Wood is underlain by brown earths of the Worcester Series.

Ivythorn Wood supports a stand of the dry Ash-Field Maple type, managed as coppice-with-standards. Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur* and Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* form the canopy. The understorey is dominated by Hazel *Corylus avellana*, but Field Maple *Acer campestre* is also common. Other species include Wild Cherry *Prunus avium*, Wild Privet *Ligustrum vulgare*, Wayfaring-tree *Viburnum lantana* and Traveller's-joy *Clematis vitalba*. The ground flora is dominated by Dog's Mercury *Mercurialis perennis* or Ivy *Hedera helix*. Secondary woodland dominated by Ash, and with a similar ground flora, occurs on Walton Hill.

An important feature of Walton and Ivythorn Hills is the way in which mature woodland grades into scrub. The scrub varies in density and is often dominated by Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, although Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, Wild Privet, Wayfaring-tree and Dogwood *Cornus sanguinea* are also common. The scrub in turn grades into species-rich unimproved calcareous grassland of the Upright Brome *Bromus erectus* type. Herbs of interest include Wild Carrot *Daucus carota*, Wild

Parsnip *Pastinaca sativa*, Greater Knapweed *Centaurea scabiosa*, Dwarf Thistle *Cirsium acaule*, Woolly Thistle *Cirsium eriophorum*, Common Restharrow *Ononis repens*, Common Rockrose *Helianthemum nummularium* and Small Scabious *Scabiosa columbaria*. Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis* and Autumn Lady's-tresses *Spiranthes spiralis* also occur.

Structural diversity within the habitats, together with the extensive areas of sheltered wood-edge and scrub-edge margins provide ideal conditions for many species of invertebrate. Butterflies, Leaf-hoppers, Spiders and Soldier Flies are particularly well represented. Butterflies with a local distribution in Somerset include Brown Argus *Aricia agestis* and Brown Hairstreak *Thecla betulae*. The Great Green Bush Cricket *Tettigonia viridissima* is also of interest.