

County: Greater London **Site Name:** Ruislip Woods

District: Hillingdon

Status: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Part Local Nature Reserve (LNR) declared under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949.

Local Planning Authority: London Borough of Hillingdon

National Grid Reference: TQ 081892 **Area:** 305.4 (ha) 754.6 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1: 50 000: 176 **1: 10 000:** TQ 08 NE & TQ 09 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1950 **Date of Last Revision:** 1975

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1990 **Date of Last Revision:** -

Other Information:

Ruislip LNR was declared in 1959 and is managed jointly by the Ruislip and District Natural History Society and the Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust. Tarleton's Lake is managed as a nature reserve by the Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust. Bayhurst Wood is a Countryside Park. There are several boundary amendments from the former SSSI, including extensions.

Reasons for Notification:

The Ruislip Woods form an extensive example of ancient semi-natural woodland, including some of the largest unbroken blocks that remain in Greater London. A diverse range of oak and hornbeam woodland types occur, with large areas managed on a traditional coppice-with-standards system. The site is also unusual in Greater London for the juxtaposition of extensive woodland with other semi-natural habitats, mostly notably acidic grass-heath mosaic and areas of wetland. These habitats and especially the woodland contain a number of plant and insect species that are rare* or scarce* in a national or local context.

The woodland lies in four major blocks, known as Bayhurst, Mad Bess, Copse and Park Woods, situated across the upper slopes and valleys at the head of several stream systems. Park Wood is the only unbroken area of ancient semi-natural woodland larger than 100 hectares in Greater London.

Nearly all the woodland is on London Clay or clays of the Reading Beds. This has given rise to soils which are acidic and frequently poorly drained, especially in some of the valleys and on the more gently sloping ground. Characteristically of such soils in south-east Britain, the woodland cont.....

Ruislip Woods (cont...)

is mostly dominated by pedunculate oak *Quercus robur*, sessile oak *Q. petraea*, hornbeam *Carpinus betulus* and birch *Betula* species. These occur in a number of distinctly recognisable stand-types such as lowland birch/sessile oak woodland, a variant of pedunculate oak-hornbeam woodland and acidic sessile oak-hornbeam woodland. Most of the stand types are uncommon or localised in Great Britain, and these include the oak and hornbeam types which cover large areas in each of the woods.

The woodland varies widely in structure, with parts supporting mature high forest and more extensive areas supporting hornbeam coppice with oak standards. There are also areas of recent secondary woodland at various stages of development toward high forest. In recent years management of the old coppice has been reinstated on a large scale adding further variety to the woodland features.

The distribution of the different stand types partly reflects the soils and former management. The pedunculate oak-hornbeam woods occur predominantly in Mad Bess Wood, Copse Wood and the southern part of Park Wood. These are replaced by sessile oak-hornbeam wood in the north of Park Wood and Bayhurst Wood. Also in Bayhurst Wood the occurrence of beech *Fagus sylvatica* provides a transition to acidic sessile oak-beech woodland. Examples of birch-oak woodland tend to occur on more freely draining soils, particularly in Copse and Park Woods. Many of the tree and shrub species that are associated with ancient woodland occur within these woods. These include field maple *Acer campestre*, midland hawthorn *Crataegus laevigata*, aspen *Populus tremula*, wild cherry *Prunus avium*, wild service tree *Sorbus torminalis* and guelder-rose *Viburnum opulus*. Where the drainage is impeded the range of species also includes alder *Alnus glutinosa*, willow *Salix* species and the less common alder buckthorn *Frangula alnus*.

The acidic soils give rise to a characteristically limited ground flora which is often sparse or absent under the dense shade of old hornbeam coppice. The dominant species include bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum*, creeping soft-grass *Holcus mollis* and, in places, bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*.

Along rides, in areas of recently-cut coppice and on damper ground in the stream valleys, the ground flora tends to be more diverse. Many of the species are strongly associated with ancient woodland such as wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, yellow archangel *Lamium galeobdolon*, yellow pimpernel *Lysimachia nemorum* and betony *Stachys officinalis*. Several others are scarce in Greater London, including broad-leaved helleborine *Epipactis helleborine*, violet helleborine *E. purpurata* and common cow-wheat *Melampyrum pratense*.

Areas of wetland vegetation occur in some of the main valleys, such as at Ruislip Local Nature Reserve which supports a species-rich association of willow carr, tall fen and swamp communities. Additional diversity is provided by the juxtaposition of the woodland with areas of acidic grassland, neutral grassland and open heath. Poor's Field, situated adjacent to Copse Wood on the sand and clays of the lower Reading Beds, supports a complex mosaic of these habitats. Characteristic species of the more acidic parts include heather *Calluna vulgaris*, tormentil *Potentilla erecta* and mat-grass *Nardus stricta*.

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Ruislip Woods (cont...)

Species which are rare or scarce in Greater London such as heath spotted orchid *Dactylorhiza maculata*, petty whin *Genista anglica*, lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica* and dwarf gorse *Ulex minor* also occur.

The woodlands and adjacent open habitats support an insect fauna which includes nationally rare* and nationally scarce* species of moths (*Lepidoptera*), beetle (*Coleoptera*) and two-winged flies (*Diptera*). Among the rarer species are two moths, the light orange underwing *Archiearis notha* and the lead-coloured drab *Orthosia populeti* associated with aspen, and the great oak beauty *Boarmia roboraria*, a moth whose larvae feed on oak. The Diptera include a nationally rare soldier fly *Xylomyia maculata* (vulnerable**) which is confined to a few ancient woodlands containing over-mature trees with rot holes.

The Ruislip Woods also support a diverse range of breeding birds characteristic of woodland habitat. These include tawny oak *Strix aluco*, all three British species of woodpecker: green *Picus viridus*, greater spotted *Dendrocopos major* and lesser spotted *D. minor*, willow tit *Parus montanus*, nuthatch *Sitta europaea* and the less common woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* and hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*. The large extent of the woods and the presence of adjoining open habitats provide particularly suitable conditions for several of the less common breeding species.

* Nationally rare: recorded from 15 or less 10 km squares in Britain; nationally scarce: 15-100 km squares.

** The term 'vulnerable' refers to status category 2 in Shirt, D B, (ed) 1987, **British Red Data Books 2**, Insects. The status of individual species is subject to periodic review.