

**COUNTY:** BUCKINGHAMSHIRE      **SITE NAME:** KINGCUP MEADOWS & OLDHOUSE WOOD

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

**Local Planning Authorities:** Buckinghamshire County Council, South Bucks District Council

**National Grid Reference:** TQ030851

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:** 176      **1:10,000:** TQ08 NW TQ08 SW

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

**Area:** 13.21 ha 32.64 ac

### **Description and Reasons for Notification**

Kingcup Meadows and Oldhouse Wood constitutes an intimate mosaic of habitats adjacent to the River Alderbourne, which includes woodland, unimproved pastures and semi and unimproved meadowland. The fields are comprised of dry grassland, wet grassland and areas of fen and swampy vegetation. Unimproved grassland and wetland habitats have declined nationally as a result of agricultural improvement and are now very scarce within the county of Buckinghamshire. Oldhouse Wood has been managed in the past as coppice-with-standards and retains a wide range of native trees and shrubs, along with many woodland species indicative of ancient woodland.

Most of the site is situated on gravelly river alluvium and plateau terrace drift. The resulting soils vary from deep stoneless silty soils overlying aeolian drift on the eastern edge of the site to shallow, calcareous or non-calcareous fine to coarse loams. All of the soils found along this section of the Alderbourne Valley are seasonally waterlogged or affected by ground water for much of the year.

The two easternmost fields are managed as pasture and grazed by cattle, whereas the fields adjacent to Oldhouse Wood are drier and support a late annual hay crop with aftermath grazing. Old anthills are a feature of the unimproved dry grassland. The grasses here include red fescue *Festuca rubra* and crested dog's tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, with herbs such as devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, cat's-ear *Hypochoeris radicata*, common knapweed *Centaurea nigra* and ox-eye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*.

The wetter grasslands support flood pasture communities with a high proportion of grasses such as creeping bent *Agrostis stolonifera*, cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata* and Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*. Several species of sedge are found including the brown sedge *Carex disticha*, pale sedge *C. pallescens* and common yellow sedge *C. demissa*. These last two species are of very limited distribution in Buckinghamshire. A range of species characteristic of wet fens also occurs in these waterlogged areas, including marsh marigold *Caltha palustris*, ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, sneezewort *Achillea ptarmica*, water mint *Mentha aquatica*, fen bedstraw *Galium uliginosum* and the locally uncommon marsh ragwort *Senecio aquaticus*.

Where the ground has been poached and trampled the flora includes celery-leaved buttercup *Ranunculus sceleratus*, ivy-leaved crowfoot *R. hederaceus* and bristle club rush *Isolepis setacea*, the latter species being rare in Buckinghamshire. Rushes *Juncus articulatus*, *J. inflexus* and *J. effusus* are abundant throughout the fields where conditions are particularly wet. Depressions with standing water are characterised by floating sweet grass *Glyceria fluitans* or common spike rush *Eleocharis palustris*.

Oldhouse Wood rises up from the banks of the Alderbourne. The upper slopes are of ash and field maple, with occasional hazel coppice, while the lower slopes are oak and birch woodland which now dominate a failed conifer crop. The ground flora contains many species indicative of ancient semi-natural woodland including bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, stinking iris *Iris foetidissima* and early purple orchid *Orchis mascula*. The southern end of the wood is situated on very peaty wet soils alongside the river and here alder woodland with birch, willows *Salix caprea* and *S. fragilis*, alder buckthorn *Frangula alnus* and some planted poplar hybrids *Populus* spp. occur, along with a diverse field layer typical of such wet conditions. Herb Paris *Paris quadrifolia*, a species characteristic of ancient woods is to be found on these peaty soils in one of its few Buckinghamshire localities.

The fauna of the site is poorly known, but the interest of these habitats is indicated by the presence of several species of dragonfly including the banded demoiselle *Calopteryx splendens*.