

County: Greater London **Site Name:** Saltbox Hill

District: Bromley

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

Local Planning Authority: London Borough of Bromley

National Grid Reference: TQ 402604 & 408607 **Area:** 22.2 (ha) 54.8 (ac)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1: 50 000: 177 **1: 10 000:** TQ 36 SE, TQ 46 SW

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

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985 **Date of Last Revision:** -

Other Information:

New site.

Reasons for Notification:

Saltbox Hill encompasses a relic complex of chalk grassland and open scrub clearings on the slopes of a downland valley. The grassland contains a diverse flora of typical chalk downland species and is especially rich in plants with a restricted distribution in Greater London. A large variety of butterfly species are present, including some of national importance due to their declining populations in Britain.

The site lies on steep sided slopes in a northward-running dry valley system on the North Downs. The eastern slope supports a mosaic of unimproved chalk grassland amongst an open scrub of mainly hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*. These areas grade into dense scrub and belts of ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and beech *Fagus sylvatica* hanger woodland which occupy adjoining banks on the steepest ground. To the west a small tributary valley contains a further expanse of chalk grassland with varying amounts of low hawthorn scrub. In recent years some of this scrub has been cleared and here the grassland is regenerating with a diverse variety of chalk downland plants.

Owing to the cessation of livestock grazing, the majority of the grassland is characterised by a few coarse grass species, especially upright broom *Bromus erectus* and false brome *Brachypodium sylvaticum*. Within this sward there are a variety of other grasses typical of chalk soils such as quaking-grass *Briza media*, meadow oat-grass *Avenula pratensis* and downy oat-grass *Avenula pubescens*. The grassland is however, particularly of interest for the rich diversity and abundance of colourful flowering herbs. Many are characteristic of unimproved chalk grassland but now have a very restricted distribution in Greater London due to a continuing reduction in cont.....

Saltbox Hill (cont...)

the extent of such grassland areas. The more noteworthy of these species include: yellow-wort *Blackstonia perfoliata*, carline thistle *Carlina vulgaris*, dwarf thistle *Cirsium acaule*, wild basil *Clinopodium vulgare*, horseshoe vetch *Hippocrepis comosa*, marjoram *Origanum vulgare* and cowslip *Primula veris*. In addition the site is one of the last remaining examples of old grassland containing yellow rattle *Rhinanthus minor* in the county.

A further speciality of the site is the rich diversity of orchids. In total ten species are present including pyramidal orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, white helleborine *Cephalanthera damasonium*, bee orchid *Ophrys apifera* and fly orchid *Ophrys insectifera*. Part of the eastern slope supports a notable abundance of man orchid *Aceras anthropophorum* a nationally uncommon plant which is mainly confined to the chalk downlands of southern England.

The scrub is characterised by an abundance of hawthorn which in places occurs in predominantly single species stands. Elsewhere associated shrubs include: dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*, buckthorn *Rhamnus catharticus* and wayfaring-tree *Viburnum lantana*.

The combination of habitats, from high woodland to sheltered grassland slopes rich in nectar yielding plants, supports a large and diverse range of butterflies. Over 30 species have been recorded, many on a regular basis. These include 4 species which are of national importance owing to their decline in numbers throughout Britain: the chalk-hill blue *Lysandra coridon*, dark green fritillary *Argynnis aglaja*, dingy skipper *Erynnis tages* and grizzled skipper *Pyrgus malvae*. Among the other commoner butterfly species are the small copper *Lycaena phlaeas* and common blue *Polyommatus icarus*.