COUNTY: BUCKINGHAMSHIRE SITE NAME: GOMM VALLEY

**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: SU897922

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 175 1:10,000: SU89 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1976 Date of Last Revision:

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

Area: 4.12 ha 10.18 ac

**Other information:** Managed as a Nature Reserve by the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Naturalists Trust.

## **Description and Reasons for Notification**

A tract of herb-rich chalk grassland at an advanced stage of reversion to scrub, lying on the west-facing slope of a dry valley and flanked along its upper margin by a strip of semi-natural deciduous woodland. There is a particularly rich invertebrate fauna and the site is notable for its reptile interest and large flocks of overwintering birds. Heavy use by the public has established a network of footpaths. The site is valuable for demonstrating natural succession from grassland to woodland.

The grassland is dominated by upright brome-grass *Bromus erectus*, with an impressive variety of herbs including purging flax *Linum catharticum*, carline and stemless thistles *Carlina vulgaris* and *Cirsium acaule*, squinancywort *Asperula cynanchica*, small scabious *Scabiosa columbaria*, common centaury *Centaurea erythraea*, twayblade *Listera ovata* and pyramidal, bee and common spotted orchids *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, *Ophrys apifera* and *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*.

Dogwood and hawthorn dominate the scrub and the former is particularly dense where attempts to control it by cutting back encouraged regeneration. Other woody species include privet, buckthorn *Rhamnus catharticus*, wayfaring tree *Viburnum lantana*, guelder rose *V. opulus* and dogrose *Rosa canina*. Whitebeam *Sorbus area* grows among the scrub, as well as the fringing woodland, and in the latter ash, beech, hazel and hornbeam occur, as well as Norway maple and crab apple. The field layer here includes wood melick *Melica uniflora*, wood millet *Milium effusum*, hairy brome *Bromus ramosus*, sanicle *Sanicula europaea* and nettle-leaved bell-flower *Campanula trachelium*.

Of particular interest at this site is the fact that over thirty species of butterfly (involving monitoring over a period of 25 years) and 180 of moth have been recorded, of which the most notable have been a thriving colony of dark green fritillary *Argynnis aglaia* and a bee-hawk moth *Hemaris* sp. Other butterflies include marbled white *Melanargia galathea*, small, large, dingy and grizzled skipper *Thymelicus sylvestris*, *Ochlodes venata*, *Erynnis tages* and *Pyrgus malvae*, green hairstreak *Callophrys rubi* and small blue *Cupido minimus*. An unusual feature is the population of glow-worm *Lampyris noctiluca*, while the snail fauna includes the calcicolous round-mouthed snail *Pomatias elegans*. Common lizard *Lacerta vivipara* and slow-worm *Anguis fragilis* are regularly seen.