

COUNTY: EAST SUSSEX SITE NAME: ASHBURNHAM PARK

DISTRICT: ROTHER

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

Local Planning Authority: ROTHER DISTRICT COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: TQ 695148 Area: 110.7 (ha.) 273.5 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheets 1:50,000: 199 NW 1:10,000: TQ 61 SE, TQ 71 SW, TQ 71

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

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

Other Information:

This site is listed in ‘A Nature Conservation Review’.

Reasons for Notification:

Ashburnham is a former medieval deer park lying on Tunbridge Wells Sandstone and Wadhurst Clay. The ancient woodland is one of the largest remaining areas of its kind in the country and contains many overmature trees with outstanding lichen floras. The site also supports a diverse breeding bird community.

The woodland forms three blocks separated by parkland, and a number of small deciduous and mixed plantations are also present. A stream which flows through the site has been dammed to form three ornamental lakes adding to the habitat-diversity of the site.

Pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* – beech *Fagus sylvatica* woodland covers the majority of the site including all of the northern outlier. It varies from a closed high forest to a very open woodland with holly *Ilex aquifolium* and birch *Betula* species and a shrub layer of bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and bramble *Rubus fruticosus*. Mature Scots pines *Pinus sylvestris* occur throughout. The ground flora is limited but includes Cornish Moneywort *Sibthorpia europaea* in one of its few south-east locations, and the rare hay-scented buckler-fern *Dryopteris aemula* an ‘Atlantic’ species usually found in the west of Britain.

Overmature oaks and beeches occur throughout and support a great variety of epiphytic lichens with over 160 species recorded from the site as a whole. Holly is also an important host supporting a number of particularly interesting species which are not common this far east of the New Forest.

Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* is more frequent on calcareous soils in the west of the site while damp alder *Alnus glutinosa* woodland occupies the stream valleys and lake margins. Areas of coppiced hazel *Corylus avellana*, hornbeam *Carpinus betulus* and

sweet chestnut *Castanea sativa* occur throughout the site, and there are also small mixed plantations and many scattered exotic species. Rhododendron *Rhododendron ponticum* is an invasive problem in some places.

The woodland breeding bird community has been rated as of county importance and includes species such as little owl, woodcock, marsh and willow tits, and all three species of British woodpecker.

The lakes have a rather restricted aquatic flora. White water-lily *Nymphaea alba* and yellow water-lily *Nuphar lutea* are present, and also the rare red pondweed *Potamogeton alpinus*. Fringing vegetation is dominated by reed sweet grass *Glyceria maxima*, common reed *Phragmites australis* and great reedmace *Typha latifolia*.