

COUNTY: WEST SUSSEX

SITE NAME: HALNAKER CHALK PIT

DISTRICT: CHICHESTER

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

Local Planning Authority: Chichester District Council

National Grid Reference: SU 922090

Area: 6.54 (ha.) 16.16 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 197

1:10,000: SU 90 NW

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1992

Other Information:

This is a new site. *Filago pyramidata* is proposed for addition to Schedule 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act at the second quinquennial review 1991.

Description:

The site consists of a partly vegetated pit in the Upper Chalk with peripheral areas of scrub and woodland. Halnaker Chalk Pit is important as the joint location of the largest population of a nationally rare* plant species in Great Britain.

The floor of the chalk pit has a very thin layer of soil providing comparatively few nutrients. In addition, the chalk is freely draining and these factors combine to result in a relatively harsh environment. The pit is characterised by areas of bare chalk and a patchy stunted vegetation including such species as creeping bent grass *Agrostis stolonifera*, hoary plantain *Plantago media* and scarlet pimpernel *Anagallis arvensis*.

This site is most significant for its population of the nationally rare and vulnerable⁺ broad-leaved cudweed *Filago pyramidata* with 10,000 plants (1990 figures) comprising approximately 50% of the total British population. The only other site with a comparable population is at Cuxton, Kent. This plant is typically found as a cornfield flower but as a result of modern agricultural practice has been almost extirpated. However the chalk pit provides a sufficiently suitable habitat for the plant to reach a height of a few centimetres and seed freely. Other flowering plant species found on the pit floor include wild basil *Clinopodium vulgare* and wild parsnip *Pastinaca sativa*.

As the soils become a little deeper around the edge of the pit typical chalk grassland species such as yellow-wort *Blackstonia perfoliata*, autumn gentian *Gentianella amarella* and marjoram *Origanum vulgare* become more common. This area of the pit also supports a colony of bee orchids *Ophrys apifera*.

The scrub beyond the top of the pit is dominated by elder *Sambucus nigra* and dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*. As the scrub grows into mature woodland English oak *Quercus robur* and ash *Fraxinus excelsior* are the dominant species.

notes:

*nationally rare species are those occurring in 1--15 of the 10 x 10 km squares in Britain

+classified as 'vulnerable' in the British Red Data Book of Vascular Plants (Perring and Walters, 1983. second edition)