

COUNTY: WEST SUSSEX

SITE NAME: WOOLBEDING AND POUND
COMMONS

DISTRICT: CHICHESTER DISTRICT

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 874245

Area: 171.32 (ha.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 197

1:10,000:

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 22 September 1998

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Wealden Greensand Natural Area. The site is designated as a Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) and is Registered Common Land.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Woolbeding and Pound Commons is an important area of lowland heathland situated on the Wealden Greensand of West Sussex which rises to a height of 183 metres at Older Hill. The site is a mosaic of dry heathland, wet heath, old pasture-woodland, secondary semi-natural woodland, ponds and wet flushes.

Woolbeding and Pound Commons are dominated by *Calluna vulgaris*–*Ulex minor* heath. This heathland community comprises a mixture of heather *Calluna vulgaris*, wavy hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa*, bell heather *Erica cinerea* and dwarf gorse *Ulex minor*. Bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* is locally dominant with bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, heather and grasses. The heath grades locally into a wet heath community in which cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix*, purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* and *Sphagnum compactum* are dominant. The wet heath is particularly of note for its large population of intermediate sundew *Drosera intermedia* which is rare in Sussex.

The woodland on the Commons is mainly secondary, having developed comparatively recently on formerly more open land. On the well drained areas oak *Quercus robur*, with bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and bramble *Rubus fruticosus* are found, whilst ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, field maple *Acer campestre* and dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* dominate the base-poor brown soils. The poorly drained acidic soils are characterised by birch *Betula pubescens* and purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea* with carr, grey willow *Salix cinerea* and marsh bedstraw *Galium palustre*, in the wet areas.

Most of the woodland is semi-natural acid oak and birch, with a holly *Ilex aquifolium* dominated shrub layer and bracken, bramble and some honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum* forming the ground vegetation. Beech *Fagus sylvatica* and sweet chestnut *Castanea sativa* occur locally where planted or naturally seeded. Where the soils are less acidic and less well drained on the north-western slopes, the woodland grades into a more mixed oak, birch, ash, sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* community with a greater diversity

of shrub species including hazel *Corylus avellana*, hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and grey willow.

Waterlogged areas have grey willow or alder *Alnus glutinosa* carr. The ground vegetation in these wetter areas is more diverse, supporting several species of woodland ferns including broad buckler fern *Dryopteris dilatata*, male fern *D. filix-mas*, lady fern *Athyrium filix-femina* and scaly male-fern *D. affinis*. Other species characteristic of neutral/slightly calcareous secondary woodlands also occur including enchanter's nightshade *Circaea lutetiana*, ground ivy *Glechoma hederacea*, bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, primrose *Primula vulgaris*, wood avens *Geum urbanum* and wood sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*.

Associated with the heathland is a characteristic invertebrate fauna. There are a number of notable species including the Red Data Book bee *Hylaeus gibbus* and the nationally scarce heath potter wasp *Eumenes coarctatus* and heathland wasp *Psen bruxellensis*. Other nationally scarce insects recorded on the Commons include woodland grasshopper *Omocestus rufipes*, dusky and tawny cockroaches *Ectobius lapponicus* and *E. pallidus* and the ant *Formica sanguinea*. The nationally notable bog bush cricket *Metrioptera brachyptera* occurs on the wet heath areas.

The woodland also has a rich and diverse invertebrate fauna including the rare leaf-beetle *Phytodecta decemnotata* and weevils *Rhynchites cupreus*, *Coeliodes erythroleucus* and *C. ruber*. The nationally scarce hoverfly *Epistrophe diaphana* is found along the woodland edge. A diverse range of butterflies is also found on the Commons including purple emperor *Apatura iris*, white admiral *Ladoga camilla*, silver-washed fritillary *Argynnis paphia* and purple hairstreak *Quercusia quercus*.

Locally the areas of wood pasture support an important deadwood invertebrate fauna including the Red Data Book click-beetle *Hylis olexai*, the fungus weevil *Platytomus albinus* and the longhorn beetle *Pogonocheirus hispidulus*.

The mixture of open heath, scrub and woodland provides habitat for heathland birds including three internationally important species listed on Annex I of the EU Birds Directive; woodlark *Lullula arborea*, nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* and Dartford warbler *Sylvia undata*. Other bird species found on the Common include tree sparrow, kestrel, woodcock, redstart, stonechat, and hen harrier.

All four common reptiles, adder *Vipera berus*, slow worm *Anguis fragilis*, common lizard *Lacerta vivipara* and grass snake *Natrix natrix* have been recorded on the site.