

**COUNTY:** WEST SUSSEX

**SITE NAME:** WAKEHURST & CHIDDINGLY WOODS

**DISTRICT:** MID SUSSEX

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

**Local Planning Authority:** MID SUSSEX DISTRICT COUNCIL

**National Grid Ref:** TQ 334316 (Wakehurst Woods)  
TQ 348323 (Chiddingly Woods)

**Area:** 164.0 ha; 405.2 acres

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:** 187

**1:10,000:** TQ 33 SW, SE

**Date Notified (under 1949 Act):** 1954

**Date of Last Revision:** 1980

**Date Notified (under 1981 Act):** 1987

**Date of Last Revision:** -

**Other Information:** This site lies within the High Weald Natural Area. These woods are listed in 'A Nature Conservation Review' and lie within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Part of Wakehurst Woods is owned by The National Trust. Chiddingly Wood is listed in the 'Geological Conservation Review'.

Reasons for Notification:

Wakehurst and Chiddingly Woods contain extensive exposures of sandrock, a nationally rare habitat, which are of biological and geological importance. This site has the richest sandrock community in the country, supporting a unique flora. It is the locality of an uncommon crane fly, and also has a diverse breeding community of woodland birds.

The wooded ghylls have been formed by streams cutting through formations of Wadhurst clay and Lower Tunbridge Wells sands, leaving exposed outcrops of sandstone in the valleys. The warm, moist micro-climate allows plants to flourish which are more typically restricted to the west of the country. The streams have been dammed to form a series of ponds with marginal vegetation which contribute to the value of the site for birds. Much of the woodland is semi-natural, but in some areas conifers and rhododendron have been planted.

The sandrocks in Wakehurst and Chiddingly Woods support rich communities of ferns, bryophytes (mosses and liverworts) and lichens. These are a remnant of a Western 'Atlantic' plant community which was once far more widespread in distribution. They include uncommon plants such as the Tunbridge filmy fern *Hymenophyllum tunbrigense*, bryophytes such as *Dicranum scottianum*, *Orthodontium gracile*, *Tetradontium brownianum*, *Scapania gracilis* and *Blepharostoma trichophyllum*, and some lichens of county importance.

Several types of woodland are present. On the higher slopes woodland of oak *Quercus robur* standards and hazel *Corylus avellana* coppice grade into more varied oak wood with birch *Betula spp.*, yew *Taxus baccata*, holly *Ilex aquifolium* and some beech *Fagus sylvatica*. Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* is frequent in

some areas and alder *Alnus glutinosa* occupies the springlines in the valley bottoms.

Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* and honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum* dominate the ground flora on the higher slopes; on the clays bramble *Rubus fruticosus* is prevalent, while flush communities which include opposite-leaved golden-saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* occur with the alder. Several species which are uncommon in Sussex are present here, including hay-scented fern *Dryopteris aemula*, ivy-leaved bellflower *Wahlenbergia hederacea* and green hellebore *Helleborus viridis*.

The woodlands support a diverse community of breeding birds, including all three British species of woodpecker, grey wagtail and tree pipit. At least fifty species are known to breed in Wakehurst Woods and its associated lakes, among them great crested grebe and tufted duck.

The rare crane fly *Erioptera nigripalpis* has been recorded at the site, together with several uncommon beetles. The alder carr supports a diverse snail population which includes *Spermod lamellata*, *Leiostyla anglica* and *Acicula fusca*, all uncommon species with an “Atlantic” distribution.

## GEOLOGY

Chiddingly Wood is an important geomorphological locality for sandstone weathering features developed on some of the tallest and most impressively sculptured sandstone cliffs in the central Weald. Cambering (deformation) on a large scale has produced a complex system of gulls, (tension cracks) and the cliffs are deeply undercut at their base by rock shelters and small caves. Great-upon-Little is now an isolated 400-500 tonne block standing on a narrow pedestal that has been undercut on all sides. The cliffs are particularly distinguished by a wealth of micro-weathering features, such as honeycombing and polygonal cracking of the surface. No other sandstone cliffs in the central Weald exhibit such a comprehensive suite of weathering features. Deposits of sand and angular blocks of sandstone at the base of the cliffs probably accumulated under periglacial conditions during the Pleistocene and are the best examples of their type in the central Weald. The importance of Chiddingly Wood is further emphasised by the large number of geologists and geomorphologists who have studied the weathering phenomena and morphological characteristics of the cliffs.