

COUNTY: WEST SUSSEX

SITE NAME: RAKE HANGER

DISTRICT: CHICHESTER

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

Local Planning Authority: CHICHESTER DISTRICT COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: SU 795266

Area: 29.23 (ha.) 72.24 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 186

1:10,000: SU 7Z NE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): –

Date of Last Revision: –

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1988

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:
This is a new site.

Reasons for Notification:

This is one of the few woods in the Weald where sessile oak *Quercus petraea* is the dominant species. Sessile oak is more common in the north and west of Britain, but in south-east England it occurs on sandy soils, as at this site where there is a steep scarp of Lower Green-sand (Hythe Beds). At the foot of the scarp the soils are waterlogged and are covered by alderwood, a nationally uncommon woodland community.

Sessile oak is the most abundant species on the hillside, managed as either coppice or high forest. Silver birch *Betula pendula*, whitebeam *Sorbus aria* and rowan *S. aucuparia* are frequent associates, while beech *Fagus sylvatica*, pedunculate oak *Q. robur* and hazel *Corylus avellana* are localised. The shrub layer consists almost entirely of scattered specimens of holly *Ilex aquifolium*. The ground flora is typically species poor, dominated to the south-west by bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* with wavy hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa*, bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and common cow-wheat *Melampyrum pratense*. To the north-west bracken becomes increasingly abundant. The woodland supports several species of lichen associated with ancient woodland, including *Thelotrema lepadinum* and *Haematomma elatinum*. In areas where the woodland has been cleared bracken and bilberry are common, with ling *Calluna vulgaris*, dwarf gorse *Ulex minor* and lily of the valley *Convallaria majalis* also occurring.

At the foot of the scarp over damp soil, alder *Alnus glutinosa* becomes the dominant tree, associated with hairy birch *Betula pubescens*, alder buckthorn *Frangula alnus* and grey willow *Salix cinerea*. There are several species of fern in this damper area, including both broad and narrow buckler ferns, *Dryopteris dilatata* and *D. carthusiana*. The wood club-rush *Scirpus sylvaticus* is locally abundant in wet flushes. In the alder carr there are two acid pools, one heavily shaded, the other more open and fringed by great tussock sedge *Carex paniculata*, great reed mace *Typha latifolia* and bur-reed *Sparganium erectum*. The open water supports the bog pondweed *Potamogeton polygonifolius*.

Little is known about the invertebrate fauna of this wood, although the uncommon woodland grasshopper *Omocestus rufipes* has been recorded along the woodland ride at the foot of the scarp.