

COUNTY: WEST SUSSEX

SITE NAME: ROOK CLIFT

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 822183

Area: 10.8 (ha.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:

1:10,000:

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 13 February 1997    Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

This site lies within the South Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Description and Reasons for Notification:

Rook Clift is a small wooded combe on the scarp slope of the South Downs. The soils are predominantly calcareous in nature, overlying the chalk of the Downs. Deeper soils occur at the foot of the slope, and also the course of a stream, arising within the wood.

This site is an ancient woodland which remains in a semi-natural condition. Large leaved lime *Tilia platyphyllos* dominates the canopy, together with ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and some beech *Fagus sylvatica*. Large leaved lime is a nationally scarce tree, with its natural range concentrated on the limestones of the Wye Valley and Peak District. Thus the high concentration of mature coppice stools, occurring on chalk, make this site nationally important and unique within West Sussex and the South Downs Natural Area.

The canopy of large leaved lime, together with some beech casts a heavy shade, and as a result the shrub layer is poorly developed with scattered whitebeam *Sorbus aria* and yew *Taxus baccata*. The field layer is dominated by vernal species such as ramsons *Allium ursinum* and bluebell *Endymion non-scripta*, or shade tolerant species including dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, spurge laurel *Daphne laureola* and sanicle *Sanicula europaea*. The steep sided valley around the stream is more open with a canopy dominated by ash and wych elm *Ulmus glabra*. Here the field and ground layers are more developed with stands of hart's tongue fern *Phyllitis scolopendrium* and soft shield fern *Polystichum setiferum* abundant, and opposite-leaved golden-saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* common along the stream side. The ground layer consists of a bryophyte community more commonly associated with western Woods including *Thamnobryum alopecurum*, *Eurhynchium striatum*, *Fissidens taxifolius*, and *Plagiomnium undulatum*.

This wood also supports a rich mollusc fauna including the Red Data Book species *Helicodonta obvoluta* and several which are indicative of ancient woodland.