

COUNTY: BERKSHIRE

SITE NAME: REDHILL WOOD

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

Local Planning Authorities: Newbury District Council, Berkshire County Council

National Grid Reference: SU423646

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 174 **1:10,000:** SU46 SW

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985 **Date of Last Revision:**

Area: 30 ha 74 ac

Description and Reasons for Notification

Redhill Wood consists predominantly of ancient woodland exhibiting a wide range of stand types and with particularly fine examples of birch-ash-lime, pedunculate oak-ash-hazel and valley-alder woodland. The flora is exceptionally diverse and includes several uncommon mosses and other lower plants. There is a rich insect fauna particularly associated with the clearings and glades. The ancient woodland is demarcated by a medieval and ditch system. Only the north-eastern parcel lies outside this boundary and has been derived from plantation within the last century.

The highest land at the southern boundary of the woodland (reaching 125 m) is situated on Bagshot Beds. This immediately gives way to London Clay, which underlies the majority of the site, producing initially steep and then more gently shelving north and north-east facing slopes. On the lowest ground at the north-eastern corner there is a level area underlain by Reading Beds. The clayey soils consist mostly of slow permeable and seasonally waterlogged stagnogleys of the Wickham 3 type.

Redhill Wood has a diverse range of stand-types. A narrow band of lowland birch-pedunculate oak woodland, in which sweet chestnut is a major component at the southern edge, grades into acid birch-ash-lime woodland on the lower slopes the largest example of this stand type in Berkshire. Small-leaved lime *Tilia cordata* has a localised distribution nationally, and Redhill represents one of only three sites in the county (all within 2 km of each other) from which the species is recorded. This stand-type in turn grades into the acid pedunculate oak-ash-hazel woodland of which the majority of the woodland is composed. Both the heavy soil variant in which *Rosa* spp., sallow *Salix caprea*, dogwood *Cornus sanguinea* and aspen *Populus tremula* are common, and the light soil variant, in which elder *Sambucus nigra* becomes prominent, occur at the site, but the former is particularly well represented and Redhill is an outstanding example of this community. Waterlogged soils along streams support stands of wet-valley and acid-valley alder woodland, with an associated wet ground flora. Sessile oak *Quercus petraea*, a species with a sparse distribution in Berkshire, has also been recorded.

The north-eastern corner consist of secondary woodland and scrub, dominated by young birch, ash, oak and hazel amongst grassy glades and with a mixture of young and mature planted conifers.

The flora is exceptionally rich. Over 120 species of woodland vascular plants have been recorded. More than 40 of these are species such as herb paris *Paris quadrifolia*, sanicle *Sanicula europaea* and Solomon's seal *Polygonatum multiflorum* which, in southern England, are largely confined to ancient woods, a total surpassed by few other woodlands in the country. Some species, such as golden rod *Solidago virgaurea*, cow-wheat *Melampyrum pratense*, thin-spiked sedge *Carex strigosa* and scaly male fern *Dryopteris affinis* are notably uncommon in Berkshire.

Lower plants are well represented, and the moss and liverwort flora is thought to display affinities with woodlands in both the New Forest and the Weald. Notable bryophytes include *Trichocolea tomentella*, for which Redhill is the only Berkshire site, and *Hookeria lucens* (one of only two sites), both associated with wet flushes, and also *Leucodon sciuroides* and *Orthotrichum lyellii* which occur on tree trunks. Other uncommon plants include the lichen *Lecanactis abietina* and fungus *Mycena clavularis*.

The sunny sheltered conditions provided by open rides and clearings, together with the presence of damp flushes, streams, deadwood and a mixture of ancient woodland, scrub, bracken and grassy glades produce a wide range of habitats ideal for invertebrates. Woodland edge habitats support large populations of two-winged flies (Diptera) such as *Sicus ferrugineus* which are abundant on nectar-producing plants, and *Poecilobothrus nobilatatus* which are associated with

open water and mud. Less common insects include the small pearl-bordered fritillary *Clossiana selene*, a butterfly with a dwindling distribution nationally, and the dusky cockroach *Ectobius lapponicus* which in England is largely restricted to counties south of the Thames.