

COUNTY: WILTSHIRE

SITE NAME: LANGLEY WOOD AND  
HOMAN'S COPSE SSSI

DISTRICT:

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

Local Planning Authorities: Wiltshire County Council, Salisbury District Council

National Grid Reference: SU 230206

Area: 219.28 (ha.) 541.85 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 184

1:25,000: SU 22, SU21

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985

Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Reasons for Notification:

This extensive tract of ancient forest on acid clays, locally overlain by sands and gravels, provides a valuable area for comparison with the nearby New Forest. It appears to have had no continuous history of grazing or coppicing, and to have been modified by man to a lesser degree than most woodland in lowland England. Most of the area is unbroken oak high forest *Quercus petraea* and *Q. robur* but there is a very large range of woodland stand-types which reflect variation in soils and drainage. This has produced an exceptionally rich and varied woodland, both structurally and botanically.

Several species of tree and shrub present in Langley Wood and Homan's Copse are now rare or extinct in the New Forest. Most notable is small-leaved lime *Tilia cordata* which is present in several areas, generally with tall stems grown from old coppice stools. Apart from oak, the commonest species are birch, ash and hazel (the latter being rare in the New Forest). Also present are alder, aspen, willow, hornbeam, field maple, beech, holly, yew, crab apple and wild service *Sorbus torminalis*. The relative scarcity of beech presents another interesting contrast with the New Forest.

The woodland is crossed by four streams, fed by springs where clay outcrops beneath permeable drift soils. The valley and flushed areas are dominated by alder and their flora includes such species as opposite-leaved golden saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*, ramsons *Allium ursinum*, loose-spiked wood sedge *Carex strigosa*, water avens *Geum rivale*, black-currant and red-currant *Ribes nigrum* and *sylvestre* and alder buckthorn *Frangula alnus*. The stream banks support a rich bryophyte flora, eg *Hylocomium brevirostre*, *Rhytidiadelphus loreus*, *Dicranum majus* and *Scapania undulata*. Beside one stream there are a number of plants of hay-scented buckler fern *Dryopteris aemula* in its only known locality in central southern England.

The herb layer of much of the oak high forest is relatively sparse, typically with wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, yellow archangel and hairy woodrush *Luzula pilosa*. Many scarce woodland species are present, eg lily-of-the-valley *Convallaria majalis*, great woodrush *Luzula sylvatica*, orpine *Sedum telephium*, pignut *Conopodium majus*, Solomon's-seal *Polygonatum multiflorum*, butcher's-broom *Ruscus aculeatus*, tutsan *Hypericum androsaemum* and the two shield-ferns *Polystichum aculeatum* and *P. setiferum*. Drier, acid areas, particularly on banks, support golden rod *Solidago virgaurea*, cow-wheat *Melampyrum pratense*, bitter vetch *Lathyrus montanus*, bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*, southern woodrush *Luzula forsteri* and pale sedge *Carex pallescens*.

The epiphyte lichen flora is particularly rich with many 'old forest' species, eg *Lobaria pulmonaria*, *Thelopsis rubella*, *Bacidia biatorina*, *Catillaria pulvereae*, *Arthonia elegans*

and *Porina coralloidea*. In addition some of the beard lichens are particularly luxuriant eg *Usnea ceratina*, *U. florida*, *U. inflata* and *U. rubiginea*.

As might be expected for such a large area of deciduous woodland in the south of England, there is a very wide range of breeding birds. They include buzzard, sparrowhawk, nightingale, nightjar, redstart, wood warbler, woodcock and lesser-spotted woodpecker.

The area is particularly notable for its deer populations, with individuals moving freely between these woods and the New Forest. The species present are muntjac, roe, fallow, sika and red deer.

The insects have not been studied but it is highly probable that such a large area of ungrazed and little-modified deciduous high forest will support a very interesting fauna. One area of young plantation supports a rich community of butterflies including pearl-bordered fritillary and Duke of Burgundy, both of which are very rare in the New Forest.

Included within the SSSI is a single unimproved old meadow with ridge and furrow. The sward supports a high diversity of plants typical of old meadows, including devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, creeping Jenny *Lysimachia nummularia*, water avens *Geum rivale*, meadow thistle *Cirsium dissectum*, green-winged orchid *Orchis morio*, southern marsh orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* and smooth brome *Bromus racemosus*.