

Re-notification with extension 18 December 1991.

COUNTY: GLOUCESTERSHIRE

SITE NAME: LECKHAMPTON HILL  
AND CHARLTON KINGS  
COMMON

DISTRICT: CHELTENHAM/TEWKESBURY SITE REF: 15 WWY

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

Local Planning Authority: GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL, Tewkesbury Borough Council, Cheltenham Borough Council

National Grid Reference: SO 952187

Area: 63.8 (ha.) 157.7 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 163

1:10,000: SO 91 NW, NE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1954

Date of Last Revision: 1974

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1986

Date of Last Revision: 1991

Other Information:

Within the Cotswold AONB. Boundary alteration (extension notified 18 December 1991).

Reasons for Notification:

Introduction

One of a series of unimproved Jurassic limestone grassland sites found along the Cotswold Scarp. It lies immediately south of Cheltenham and differs from many of the Cotswold Scarp grasslands in having a predominantly north-facing aspect. The site includes former quarry faces and vegetated quarry spoil and is of biological and geological interest.

Biology

A range of habitats are present including unimproved calcareous grassland, scrub, woodland, scree slopes and cliff faces. The most important and extensive feature is the grassland. This mainly consists of a tall ungrazed sward dominated by tor-grass *Brachypodium pinnatum* and upright brome *Bromus erectus* with meadow oat-grass *Avenula pratensis*, sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, and quaking grass *Briza media*. Herb species present include salad burnet *Sanguisorba minor*, common rock-rose *Helianthemum nummularium* and common bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*. On old quarry floor areas and former workings a shorter herb rich sward occurs with wild thyme *Thymus praecox*, dwarf thistle *Cirsium acaule*, yellow-wort *Blackstonia perfoliata* and autumn gentian *Gentianella amarella*.

The grassland flora includes many plants which are scarce or local at a national or county level. These include fly orchid *Ophrys insectifera*, purple milk-vetch *Astragalus danicus* and the nationally scarce musk orchid *Herminium monorchis*. It is also one of only four Gloucestershire sites for the rare meadow clary *Salvia pratensis*.

There is extensive scrub development over parts of the site. Two principal types of scrub may be distinguished: mixed broadleaf scrub dominated by hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* with blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* and wild rose *Rosa* sp.; and gorse scrub consisting of gorse *Ulex europaeus* with occasional pockets of ash *Fraxinus excelsior* regeneration. The scrub provides a food source and habitat for nesting birds such as meadow pipit *Anthus pratensis* and grasshopper warbler *Locustella naevia*, also shelter for invertebrates and small mammals.

An element of both broad-leaved and coniferous woodland occurs, including stands of mature beech *Fagus sylvatica*, secondary ash woodland on scree slopes, hazel *Corylus avellana* coppice and conifer plantations. This adds a woodland component to the flora with local species such as ivy broomrape *Orobanche hederæ*, white helleborine *Cephalanthera damasonium*, and greater butterfly-orchid *Platanthera chlorantha* present.

The site supports a variety of insects with a total of 33 species of butterfly recorded including small blue *Cupido minimus*, chalkhill blue *Lysandra coridon* the uncommon duke of burgundy fritillary *Hamearis lucina* and pearl-bordered fritillary *Boloria euphrosyne*. One species of hoverfly that has been recorded, *Leptarthus brevirostris* is nationally scarce.

The site has a strong population of the adder *Vipera berus*.

#### Geology

The Leckhampton quarries provide the thickest single cross-section through the Middle Jurassic, Inferior Oolite strata of the Cotswolds. Leckhampton has been the subject of innumerable published geological accounts in the last one hundred and fifty years and, in addition to its research interest, provides an educational locality of the first order. Strata totalling sixty metres in thickness are exposed, including elements of the Lower, Middle and Upper Inferior Oolite. These large outcrops are invaluable to the student of palaeontology or the sedimentology of limestones and for studies of ancient environments as a whole. These are nationally important exposures vital to Jurassic research and education.