

EC Directive 92/43 on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora

Citation for Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

Name:	Wye Valley Woodlands
Unitary Authority/County:	Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Monmouthshire
SAC status:	English part designated on 1 April 2005 Welsh part designated on 13 December 2004
Grid reference:	ST530957
SAC EU code:	UK0012727
Area (ha):	916.24
Component SSSI:	Astridge Wood SSSI, Bigsweir Wood SSSI, Blackcliff-Wyndcliff SSSI, Cleddon Shoots Woodland SSSI, Fiddlers Elbow SSSI, Graig Wood SSSI, Harper's Grove-Lord's Grove SSSI, Highbury Wood SSSI, Livox Wood SSSI, Lower Hael Wood SSSI, Lower Wye Gorge SSSI, Pierce, Alcove and Piercefield Woods SSSI, Shorn Cliff and Caswell Woods SSSI, Swanpool Wood and Furnace Grove SSSI, The Hudnalls SSSI, Upper Wye Gorge SSSI

Site description:

The Wye Valley lies on the southern Carboniferous limestone and contains abundant and near-continuous semi-natural woodland along the river gorge. The woods provide the most extensive examples of *Tilio-Acerion* mixed forest in the west of its distribution. A wide range of ecological variation is associated with slope, aspect and landform. The woodland occurs as a mosaic with other types, including beech *Fagus sylvatica* and pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* stands. Uncommon trees, including large-leaved lime *Tilia platyphyllos* and rare whitebeams such as *Sorbus porrigentiformis* and *S. rupicola* are found here, as well as locally uncommon herbs, including wood barley *Hordelymus europaeus*, stinking hellebore *Helleborus foetidus*, narrow-leaved bitter-cress *Cardamine impatiens* and wood fescue *Festuca altissima*.

Beech stands occur as part of a mosaic with a wide range of other woodland types and represent the western range of beech forests. In places lime *Tilia* sp., elm *Ulmus* sp. and oak *Quercus* sp. share dominance with the beech. Structurally the beech woods include old coppice, pollards and high forest types. Lady Park Wood, part of one of the component sites, is an outstanding example of near-natural old-growth structure in mixed broad-leaved woodland. The site also contains yew *Taxus baccata* woods in the south-west of the habitat's range. Yew occurs both as an understorey to other woodland trees and as major yew-dominated groves, particularly on the more stony slopes and crags.

The complex of sites also supports an important population of lesser horseshoe bats *Rhinolophus hipposideros* which roost and hibernate in natural caves and former iron mines within the woods.

Qualifying habitats: The site is designated under **article 4(4)** of the Directive (92/43/EEC) as it hosts the following habitats listed in Annex I:

- *Asperulo-Fagetum* beech forests. (Beech forests on rich to neutral soils)
- *Taxus baccata* woods of the British Isles. (Yew-dominated woodland)*
- *Tilio-Acerion* forests of slopes, screes and ravines. (Mixed woodland on base-rich soils associated with rocky slopes)*

Qualifying species: The site is designated under **article 4(4)** of the Directive (92/43/EEC) as it hosts the following species listed in Annex II:

- Lesser horseshoe bat *Rhinolophus hipposideros*

Annex I priority habitats are denoted by an asterisk (*).

This citation relates to a site entered in the Register of European Sites for Great Britain.

Register reference number: UK0012727

Date of registration: 14 June 2005

Signed: *Trew Salmon*

On behalf of the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

The site is also entered in the Register of European sites for Wales, maintained by the National Assembly for Wales.