

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

Citation for Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

Name: Cotswold Beechwoods
Unitary Authority/County: Gloucestershire
SAC status: Designated on 1 April 2005
Grid reference: SO898134
SAC EU code: UK0013658
Area (ha): 585.85
Component SSSI: Cotswold Commons and Beechwoods SSSI

Site description:

The site consists of ancient beech woodland and unimproved grassland lying over Jurassic limestones at the western edge of the Cotswolds. The woodlands are amongst the most diverse and species-rich of their type while the grasslands typify the unimproved calcareous pastures for which the area is famous.

The woods are structurally varied, including blocks of high forest and some areas of remnant beech coppice. The canopy is dominated by beech *Fagus sylvatica*, with ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* and some areas of sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*. Characteristic understorey species include holly *Ilex aquifolium* and yew *Taxus baccata* but regenerating ash, sycamore and beech often accounts for much of the shrub layer. The field layer consists mainly of bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg., dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* and ivy *Hedera helix*. Rare plants include red helleborine *Cephalanthera rubra*, stinking hellebore *Helleborus foetidus*, narrow-lipped helleborine *Epipactis leptochila* and wood barley *Hordelymus europaeus*. The fauna of the woods includes an exceptional variety of invertebrate species, including a rich mollusc fauna.

The unimproved limestone grassland swards are generally dominated by upright brome *Bromopsis erecta*, tor-grass *Brachypodium pinnatum* and sheep's-fescue *Festuca ovina*, with quaking grass *Briza media* and a wide range of other flowering herbs. Typical plants include cowslips *Primula veris*, common bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, common rock-rose *Helianthemum nummularium*, wild thyme *Thymus praecox* and field scabious *Knautia arvensis*

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 neutral to rich soils)
- Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*). (Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone)

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

Register reference number: UK0013658

Date of registration: 14 June 2005

Signed: *Trevor Salmon*

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