

COUNTY: BERKSHIRE

SITE NAME: KENNET VALLEY ALDERWOODS

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: SU400675 SU444669

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 174 **1:10,000:** SU36 NE, SU46 NW, SU46 SW

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 13 March 1997 **Date of Last Revision:**

Area: 56.8 ha 140.35 ac

Description and Reasons for Notification

These woodlands are the largest remaining fragments of damp, ash-alder woodland in the Kennet floodplain. The SSSI includes two woods, the Wilderness and part of Ryott's Plantation. Both are situated on alluvium, overlain by a shallow layer of moderately calcareous peat through most of the woodland. The water table is relatively high, giving a range of soil moisture conditions from waterlogged to relatively dry.

The woods are important because they support a very great diversity of plants associated with this woodland type, and display a complete transition from open water and swamp through to relatively dry woodland. Floodplain woodlands exhibiting this complete transition are rare throughout Europe.

The woods are generally dominated by alder *Alnus glutinosa*, though ash *Fraxinus excelsior* is abundant in places and there is occasional oak *Quercus robur* and elm *Ulmus glabra*. There is a shrub layer of scattered hazel *Corylus avellana*, grey willow *Salix cinerea*, hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* and guelder rose *Viburnum opulus* with occasional spindle *Euonymus europaeus*, dogwood *Thelycrania sanguinea* and buckthorn *Rhamnus catharticus*.

The wettest parts support yellow flag *Iris pseudacorus*, lesser pond sedge *Carex acutiformis*, water horsetail *Equisetum fluviatile*, hemlock water dropwort *Oenanthe crocata* and narrow buckler fern *Dryopteris carthusiana*. Of particular interest is the large amount of remote sedge *Carex remota* and golden saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*, both of which have a limited distribution in Berkshire. Drier areas tend to be dominated by dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* with nettle *Urtica dioica* and herb robert *Geranium robertianum*. A notable feature of the drier areas is the remarkable abundance of herb paris *Paris quadrifolia*, an uncommon plant strongly associated with ancient woodlands on calcareous soils, but which is rarely found in alder woodland. More open areas in the woods have stands of reed *Phragmites communis*.

In addition to the wide range of higher plants the woods support a diverse bryophyte flora including the uncommon epiphytes *Radula complanata*, *Zygodon viridissimus* and *Orthotrichum affine*.