

SITE NOTIFIED TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE ON 10 JULY 1990

COUNTY: TYNE AND WEAR

SITE NAME: THORNLEY WOOD

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

Local Planning Authority: GATESHEAD METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

National Grid Reference: NZ 177608

Ordnance Survey Sheets 1:50,000: 88 1:10,000: NZ 16 SE

Area: 14.8 (ha.) 36.6 (ac.)

First Notified: 1990

Description:

Thornley Wood is one of the few remaining areas of semi-natural woodland in the Lower Derwent Valley and is representative of a type widespread in the Durham coalfield, though many examples have been heavily modified by management practices including planting of conifers.

The woodland varies with soil conditions and past management history. Over much of the wood downy birch *Betula pubescens* and oak – both sessile *Quercus petraea* and pedunculate *Q. robur* – are the main canopy formers. Some stands have hazel *Corylus avellana* and a ground flora of creeping soft-grass *Holcus mollis*, wood-sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*, male-fern *Dryopteris filix-mas* and broad-buckler fern *D. dilatata*, while on more acid soils holly *Ilex aquifolium* becomes the most abundant shrub species over a flora dominated by wavy hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa* and bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* with some heather *Calluna vulgaris*, common cow-wheat *Melampyrum pratense*, hairy wood-rush *Luzula pilosa* and hard fern *Blechnum spicant*. Where soils are damper and base-rich, ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and wych elm *Ulmus glabra* or alder *Alnus glutinosa* are the canopy formers and the ground flora tends to be herb-rich. Woodruff *Galium odoratum*, dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, wood melick *Melica uniflora*, ramsons *Allium ursinum*, sanicle *Sanicula europea*, moschatel *Adoxa moschatellina*, lesser celandine *Ranunculus ficaria* and wood-sedge *Carex sylvatica* are all common while in the most strongly flushed areas meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, Marsh hawk's-beard *Crepis paludosa*, wild angelica *Angelica sylvestris*, common valerian *Valeriana officinalis*, remote sedge *Carex remota*, pendulous sedge *C. pendula* and great horsetail *Equisetum telmateia* occur. These flushes also support the locally rare narrow buckler-fern *Dryopteris carthusiana*, while oak fern *Gymnocarpium dryopteris* is also found in the wood.

The well developed structure of Thorney Wood provides habitat for many species of invertebrates, most notably the nationally rare moth *Dioryctria abietella* (Pyralidae) and the diptera *Helina quadrinotata* and *Stratiomys potamida*. In addition the woodland supports breeding pairs of nuthatch, wood warbler, redstart, spotted and pied flycatchers, as well as great spotted woodpecker, woodcock, sparrowhawk and tawny owl. Badgers also frequent the wood and there are small numbers of red squirrel which are present here at one of few sites within the county.

Other Information:

This site is managed as a nature reserve by Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council.