

Ash to Brookwood Heaths SPA Incl. Ash SAC:

COUNTY: SURREY

SITE NAME: ASH TO BROOKWOOD HEATHS

BOROUGH: GUILDFORD, WOKING

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

Local Planning Authorities: GUILDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL, WOKING BOROUGH COUNCIL

National Grid References: SU 920 540
SU 945 537
SU 956 545
SU 958 555

Area: 1296.4 ha (3203.4 acres)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 186

1:10,000: SU 85 SE, SU 95 NW, NE, SW, E

Date Notified (under 1949 Act): 1975

Date Notified (under 1981 Act): 1988

Other Information: This site lies within the London Basin Natural Area. The site was formerly part of Chobham and Pirbright Group SSSI. It has been revised and extended at renotification, and some small areas deleted. It is included in 'A Nature Conservation Review'*

Reasons for Notification:

The commons, army ranges and other heaths included within this site form the largest area of dry heathland remaining anywhere in the London Basin together with extensive wet heath, bog and associated habitats. They support rich communities of plants and animals, many of which, like the heathland habitats upon which they depend, are becoming increasingly rare.

In Western Surrey, heathland was once very extensive, but has now become severely reduced as a result of agricultural improvement, urban growth, road building and forestry. Much of that which remains has been invaded by scrub from lack of traditional stock grazing. This site includes large areas of Ministry of Defence land which have been protected from development by use as army ranges, although these too suffer from lack of grazing.

The major part of the site consists of a large block of heathland centred on the army ranges of Cleygate, Wyke and Ash Commons and part of Pirbright Common. Three other extensive heathland areas lying to the east | Brookwood Cemetery, Bullswater Common to the south of this, and Stanford Common (Cobbett Hill) | are also included.

The site lies on the acidic sands of the Barton Beds, which are overlain in places by Plateau Gravels. At the eastern and western margins the underlying Bracklesham Beds are exposed, which are sand often combined with clay and pebbles. Where the water table is close to the surface the soil is waterlogged and peat has developed, but on the higher ground the free-draining sand and gravel give rise to a very dry acidic sandy soil.

The dry areas support open heathland dominated by ling heather *Calluna vulgaris* together with bell heather *Erica cinerea*, dwarf gorse *Ulex minor* and in some areas bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*. Grassy areas are interspersed, where red fescue *Festuca rubra*, wavy hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa*, purple moorgrass *Molinia caerulea* and common bent grass *Agrostis capillaris* form a rough turf. Other plants include petty whin *Genista anglica*, birds-foot *Ornithopus perpusillus*, buckshorn plantain *Plantago coronopus* and several which are rare or local in Surrey such as yellow rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, slender trefoil *Trifolium micranthum* and silver hair-grass *Aira caryophyllea*. In many places, particularly near

the edges of open areas, prolonged lack of grazing and heavy scrub invasion has led to the development of dense stands of bracken, silver birch *Betula pendula* scrub or secondary woodland composed of Scot's pine *Pinus sylvestris*, silver birch, oak *Quercus robur* and holly *Ilex aquifolium* with a ground layer of surviving heath plants such as bell heather and bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus*, or bracken, bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg. and honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum*.

Where the water table is nearer the surface a wet, acid, peaty soil supports wet heath composed of cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix*, with ling heather, deer-grass *Trichophorum cespitosum* and bog mosses *Sphagnum* spp., often interspersed with purple moor-grass. Other plants include common sedge *Carex nigra*, round-leaved sundew *Drosera rotundifolia*, sharp-flowered rush *Juncus acutiflorus*, tufted hair-

grass *Deschampsia cespitosa* and Surrey rarities such as meadow thistle *Cirsium dissectum*, southern marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*, marsh lousewort *Pedicularis palustris* and bristle club-rush *Isolepis setacea*. Where lack of grazing has led to scrub invasion downy birch *Betula pubescens*, silver birch and sallow *Salix cinerea* form scrub with a ground layer of purple moor-grass, which has developed in some areas into alder *Alnus glutinosa* woodland, where plants such as hard fern *Blechnum spicant* and the Surrey rarity white sedge *Carex curta* grow.

A number of areas of both wet and dry heath are kept mown for use as rifle ranges, the short heather providing habitat for a number of specialised plants and animals including woodlark *Lullula arborea*.

The range of heathland habitats also includes bare sandy tracks, where the Surrey rarities allseed *Radiola linoides* and chaffweed *Anagallis minima* have been found.

In very wet parts of the site where the ground is waterlogged throughout the year, bogs have developed. Here common cotton-grass *Eriophorum angustifolium*, bog-mosses *Sphagnum* spp. and bog asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum* grow over deep peat. Other plants include oblong-leaved sundew *Drosera intermedia*, bog myrtle *Myrica gale*, sharp-flowered rush, marsh bog violet *Viola palustris* and Surrey rarities marsh St John's-wort *Hypericum elodes*, many-stalked spike-rush *Eleocharis multicaulis*, white beak-sedge *Rhynchospora alba*, and, in bog pools, bog-bean *Menyanthes trifoliata*.

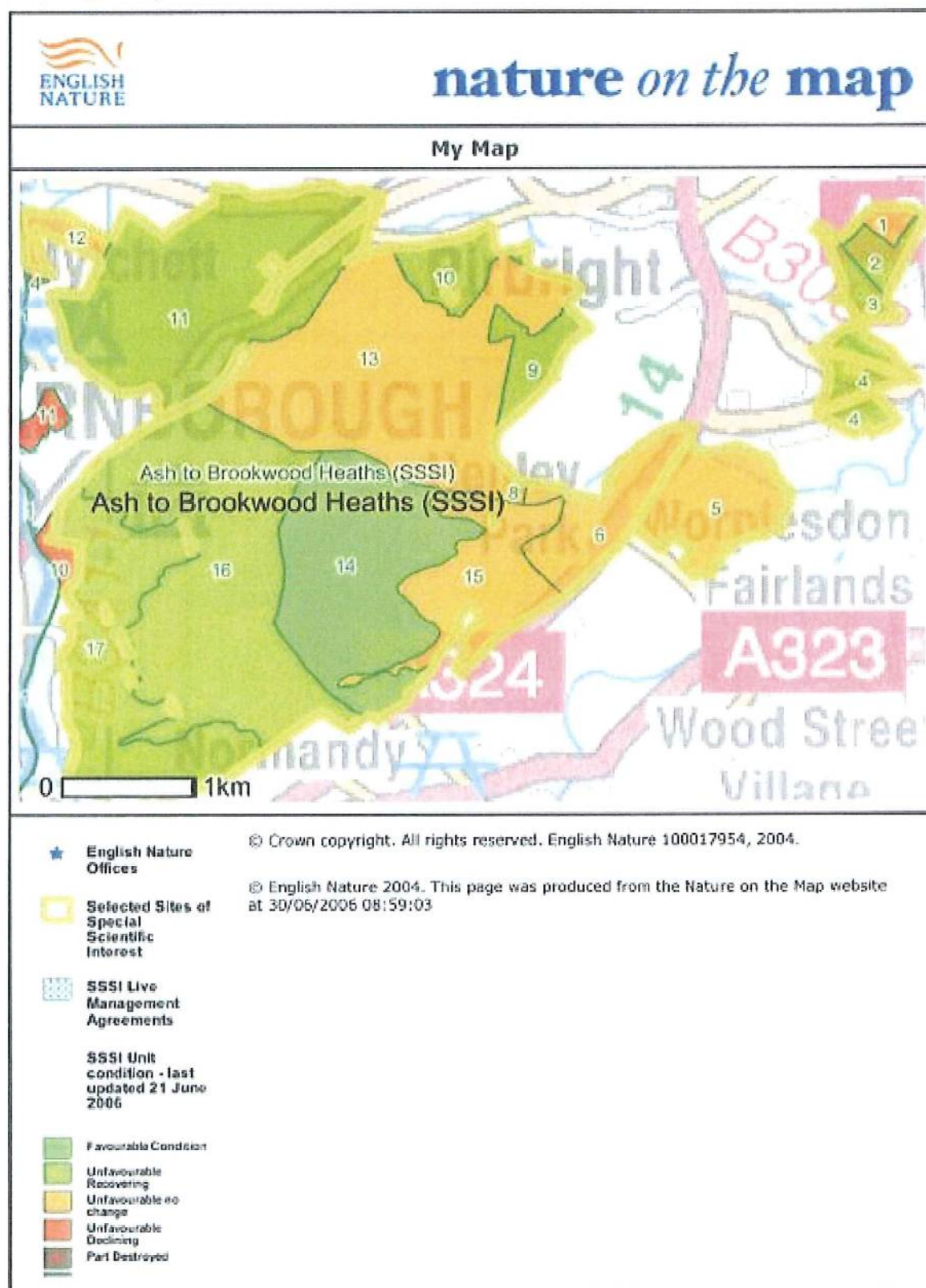
One such pool, Peatmoor Pond (map reference SU 930 538) is particularly rich, and is one of the few British localities of the very rare slender cotton-grass *Eriophorum gracile*. Henley Park Lake (SU 934 536) is an acidic lake, with the aquatic vegetation dominated by floating club-rush *Eleogiton fluitans*, and fringed on the eastern edge by fragments of bog.

The site is an important one for mosses and liverworts (Bryophytes), supporting at least ten species of bog-moss *Sphagnum* spp., and a number of local rarities including the liver-wort *Pallavicinia lyelli*, the bog-moss *Sphagnum molle*, and the moss *Atrichum tenellum*.

The range of plant communities within this site provides habitats for many heathland invertebrates some of which, such as the scarce bog bush cricket *Metrioptera brachyptera* prefer wet heath, while others live in dry heath or, like the rare solitary wasp *Psen spooneri* breed in bare sand beside tracks. Other invertebrates of note include the rare spider *Oxyopes heterophthalmus*, the rare fly *Erioptera neilseni* and the scarce damselfly *Ceriagrion tenellum*. The site also supports a typical reptile fauna, which includes the specially protected smooth snake *Coronella austriaca*.

The diverse habitats within the site also provide ideal breeding areas for many birds, many of which rely on extensive areas of open land or scrub. Among these are redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*, yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*, tree pipit *Anthus trivialis*, nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*, and woodlark *Lullula arborea*.

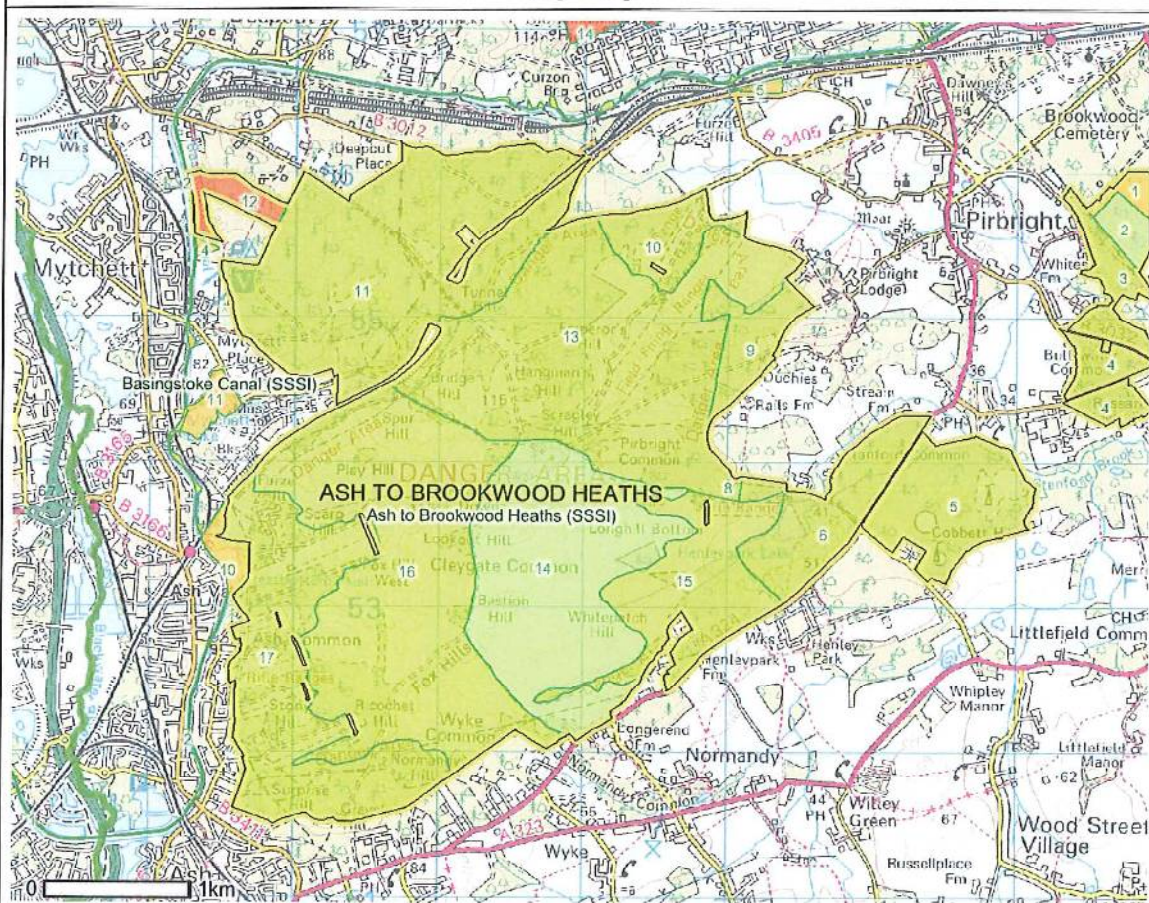
*'A Nature Conservation Review', D A Ratcliffe (1977), Cambridge





Nature on the Map

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| SSSI Unit condition - last updated 21 Apr 2011 | ■ Scotland, Wales and Ireland |
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| ■ Favourable Condition | |
| ■ Unfavourable Recovering | |
| ■ Unfavourable no change | |
| ■ Unfavourable Declining | |
| ■ Part Destroyed | |
| ■ Destroyed | |
| ■ Not Assessed | |

EC Directive 79/409 on the Conservation of Wild Birds Special Protection Area (SPA)

Name: Thames Basin Heaths

Unitary Authority/County: Bracknell Forest; Hampshire; Surrey; Windsor and Maidenhead.

Site description: The Thames Basin Heaths SPA is a composite site that is located across the counties of Surrey, Hampshire and Berkshire in southern England. It encompasses all or parts of Ash to Brookwood Heaths Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Bourley and Long Valley SSSI, Bramshill SSSI, Broadmoor to Bagshot Woods and Heaths SSSI, Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons SSSI, Chobham Common SSSI, Colony Bog and Bagshot Heaths SSSI, Eelmoor Marsh SSSI, Hazeley Heath SSSI, Horsell Common SSSI, Ockham and Wisley Commons SSSI, Sandhurst to Owlsmoor Bogs and Heaths SSSI and Whitmoor Common SSSI.

The open heathland habitats overlie sand and gravel sediments which give rise to sandy or peaty acidic soils, supporting dry heathy vegetation on well-drained slopes, wet heath on low-lying shallow slopes and bogs in valleys. The site consists of tracts of heathland, scrub and woodland, once almost continuous, but now fragmented into separate blocks by roads, urban development and farmland. Less open habitats of scrub, acidic woodland and conifer plantations dominate, within which are scattered areas of open heath and mire. The site supports important breeding populations of a number of birds of lowland heathland, especially nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* and woodlark *Lullula arborea*, both of which nest on the ground, often at the woodland/heathland edge, and Dartford warbler *Sylvia undata*, which often nests in gorse *Ulex* sp. Scattered trees and scrub are used for roosting.

Together with the nearby Ashdown Forest and Wealden Heaths SPAs, the Thames Basin Heaths form part of a complex of heathlands in southern England that support important breeding bird populations.

Size of SPA: The SPA covers an area of 8274.72 ha.

Qualifying species:

The site qualifies under article 4.1 of the Directive (79/409/EEC) as it is used regularly by 1% or more of the Great Britain populations of the following species listed in Annex I in any season:

Annex 1 species	Count and season	Period	% of GB population
Nightjar <i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>	264 churring males – breeding	1998/99	7.8%
Woodlark <i>Lullula arborea</i>	149 pairs – breeding	1997	9.9%
Dartford warbler <i>Sylvia undata</i>	445 pairs – breeding	1999	27.8%

Non-qualifying species of interest: Hen harrier *Circus cyaneus*, merlin *Falco columbarius*, short-eared owl *Asio flammeus* and kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* (all Annex I species) occur in non-breeding numbers of less than European importance (less than 1% of the GB population).

Status of SPA:

Thames Basin Heaths was classified as a Special Protection Area on 9 March 2005.

This citation/map relates to a site entered in the Register of European sites for Great Britain.
Register reference number.....UK
Date of registration.....9 March 2005
Signed..... <i>[Signature]</i>
On behalf of the Secretary of State for Environment Food and Rural Affairs

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

Citation for Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

Name: Thursley, Ash, Pirbright and Chobham
Unitary Authority/County: Surrey
SAC status: Designated on 1 April 2005
Grid reference: SU914411
SAC EU code: UK0012793
Area (ha): 5138.00
Component SSSI: Ash to Brookwood Heaths SSSI, Chobham Common SSSI, Colony Bog and Bagshot Heath SSSI, Thursley, Hankley and Frensham Commons SSSI

Site description:

The heathland is a series of large fragments of previously more continuous areas and is principally dominated by heather – dwarf gorse (*Calluna vulgaris* – *Ulex minor*) dry heathland. There are transitions to wet heath and valley mire, scrub, woodland and acid grassland, including types rich in annual plants. This habitat supports an important assemblage of animal species, including numerous rare and local invertebrate species, including the nationally rare white-faced darter *Leucorrhinia dubia*, as well as sand lizard *Lacerta agilis* and smooth snake *Coronella austriaca*.

This site supports the sole area of lowland northern Atlantic wet heath in south-east England. The wet heath at Thursley is mainly cross-leaved heath – bog-moss (*Erica tetralix* – *Sphagnum compactum*) and contains several rare plants, including great sundew *Drosera anglica*, bog hair-grass *Deschampsia setacea*, bog orchid *Hammarbya paludosa* and brown beak-sedge *Rhynchospora fusca*.

Depressions on peat substrates are widespread, both in bog pools, mires and in flushes where they occur as part of a mosaic associated with valley bog and wet heath. They show extensive representation of brown-beak sedge and are also important for great sundew and bog orchid *Hammarbya paludosa*.

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:

- Depressions on peat substrates of the *Rhynchosporion*
- European dry heaths
- Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix*. (Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath)

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

Register reference number: UK0012793

Date of registration: 14 June 2005

Signed: *Trevor Salmon*

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