

Woods near Shepherdswell SNCI (Sites of Nature Conservation Interest)
Kent Trust for Nature Conservation (1/7/1993)

<u>Sites of Nature Conservation Interest</u>		Site Ref No:	DO 40
Site	The Knees and Disused Railway Line, Shepherdswell	Map Ref:	TR 268492 270491
LPA:	Dover	AONB:	No
Parish:	Shepherdswell with Coldred	SLA	Yes
Owner:	British Rail/Private	AHNCV:	No
Grade:	I	TPO:	Yes
Category	Woodland, scrub, grassland	ASSA:	No
		Grade	I/II
		Agricultural land:	Part
		Scheduled species:	
Area	18.61 ha/45.99 acres	Public rights of way:	Part

DESCRIPTION

This is a varied site which includes woodland, scrub, chalk grassland and a linear strip with chalk cliff grassland and scrub along the disused railway line between Shepherdswell and Eythorne.

The woodland is a mosaic of ancient woodland, formerly managed as coppice-with-standards, and secondary woodland with dense hawthorn and, dogwood scrub.

The coppice species include hazel, ash and field maple and occasionally hornbeam. The shrub layer is dense in parts with both species of hawthorn, elder and bramble. The ground flora includes many common woodland species such as bluebell Hyacinthoides non-scripta, wood anemone Anemone nemorosa, moschatel Adoxa moschatellina and yellow archangel Galeobdolon luteum. Common orchids such as early purple Orchis mascula and twayblade Listera ovata are widespread and common, while greater butterfly orchid Platanthera chiorantha occurs rarely. Secondary woodland of sycamore, ash, hawthorn and downy birch is found along the woodland margins. Areas of dense scrub interspersed with chalk grassland occur to the east of the woodland and support a wide range of chalk species including abundant rock-rose Helianthemum chamaecistus, common milkwort Polygala vulgaris, greater knapweed Centaurea scabiosa and small scabious Scabiosa columbaria. Common spotted orchid Dactylorhiza fuchsii is frequent and the nationally rare man orchid Aceras anthropophorum occurs rarely. Scrub includes dog rose Rosa canina, dogwood, hawthorn and wayfaring tree.

A larger area of rough damper scrub with tall herbs adds interest to the site, as does a further rough unmanaged meadow, near the level crossing. The woodland and adjacent scrub is rich in birdlife, and many warbler species, nightingale, turtle dove and green woodpecker are present. Common butterflies including speckled wood, common blue, meadow brown, gatekeeper, ringlet and marbled white were abundant on the day of visit.

The linear area associated with the old railway has tall vertical cliffs on either side in some parts; elsewhere, the surrounds are lower, with scrub, woodland and rough grassland. A rich mix of chalk herbs and grasses with occasional chalk~ shrub species clothes the cliffs, scree and lower ground in the railway cutting. Kidney vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria*, restharrow *Ononis repens*, common milkwort, canine thistle *Canina vulgaris*, cowslip *Primula veris*, lady's bedstraw *Galium verum* and bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* are present.

The sheltered habitat is ideal for invertebrates, and many common butterflies and day-flying moths are present. The scrubby areas support a good common bird fauna including yellowhammer, tits and finches.

An area of rough, unmanaged, unimproved chalk grassland with scattered scrub, to the west of Shepherdswell at Golgotha, has also been included in the site. The grassland is heavily rabbit grazed in part, although there are also areas of taller vegetation. Nearer the road to Eythorne the dominant grasses are false oat-grass *Arrhenatherum elatius* and cocksfoot *Dactylis glomerata*, with a wealth of common meadow plants such as oxeye daisy *Chrysanthemum leucanthemum*, vetches *Vicia* spp., meadow vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis*, grass vetchling *Lathyrus nissolia* and ragwort *Senecio jacobaea*. Elsewhere the dominant grass is erect brome *Bromus erectus*, with red fescue *Festuca rubra*, quaking grass *Briza media* and glaucous sedge *Carex flacca*. Rock-rose, cowslip, salad burnet *Sanquisorba minor*, bird's-foot-trefoil, marjoram *Origanum vulgatum* and horseshoe vetch *Hippocrepis comosa* are common, together with small scabious *Scabiosa columbaria*. Ant hills are present. Several clumps of an unusual *salvia* are notable. The scrub is young with hawthorn, dogwood, wayfaring tree and roses.

The site supports many common invertebrates. Grasshoppers, butterflies and day-flying moths were abundant on the day of visit.

Slow worm and common lizard were also observed.

Further bird and invertebrate survey work is required for the whole area. Another similar area occurs further to the north-east, although this has more low scrub of dogwood, rose and hawthorn.

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