

**COUNTY:** OXFORDSHIRE

**SITE NAME:** SIDLINGS COPSE AND COLLEGE POND

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

**Local Planning Authorities:** South Oxfordshire District Council

**National Grid Reference:** SP555095

**Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000:** 164 **1:10,000:** SP50 NW, SP50 NE

**Date Notified (Under 1949 Act):** 1975 **Date of Last Revision:** 1977

**Date Notified (Under 1981 Act):** 1986 **Date of Last Revision:**

**Area:** 22.2 ha 54.9 ac

**Other information:** Formerly included within the site notified as Wick Copse SSSI.

### **Description and Reasons for Notification**

This site consists of a mosaic of several habitats including calcareous fen, carr, broadleaved woodland scrub, reedbed, open water and acid and limestone grassland, lying in close proximity in and around a steeply sloping valley. Over 400 plants are recorded including several uncommon species, one of which is afforded special protection under Schedule 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act. Twenty-eight species of butterfly, 149 species of moth and several uncommon molluscs have been reported. The site has a long history of recording and was well known to early Oxford naturalists such as Gerard, Cole, Ashmole and Druce.

The underlying Corallian limestone is covered partly by shallow, brashy calcareous soils of the Elmton 1 series and partly by well-drained coarse, loamy, sandy and acid soils of the Fyfield 2 series. The valley floor is peaty and a stream drains westwards through the valley.

Sidlings Copse consists largely of standards dominated by oak, ash, cherry and birch over a rich understorey of hazel, blackthorn, field maple, hawthorn and dogwood. There are some areas of planted beech, larch, Scots pine and sweet chestnut.

The ground flora which is dominated by dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis* is rich in species indicative of ancient woodland and includes wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, yellow archangel *Lamium galeobdolon*, nettle-leaved bellflower *Campanula trachelium*, toothwort *Lathraea squamaria*, herb Paris *Paris quadrifolia* and early dog violet *Viola reichenbachiana*. There is a small population of the very local green-flowered helleborine *Epipactis phyllanthes*. In the more acid, ash and birch dominated areas the flora is dominated by bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and brambles *Rubus* spp. The woodland supports a diverse fungus flora which includes scarlet elf cup *Saracoscypa coccinea*, earthstar *Geastrum rufescens* and bird's nest fungus *Crucibulum vulgare*.

Woodland butterflies recorded include white admiral *Ladoga camilla*, purple hairstreak *Quercusia quercus* and white-letter hairstreak *Strymonidia w-album*. Amongst the diverse mollusc fauna are two indicators of old woodland, *Acicula fusca* and *Ena montana*. The wood contains an active badger sett and supports a typical woodland avifauna, including all three species of British woodpecker.

The wetter soils of the valley support fen and carr habitats. The calcareous fen is dominated by common reed *Phragmites australis*, meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, hemp agrimony *Eupatorium cannabinum*, reed canary grass *Phalaris arundinacea* and willowherbs *Epilobium* spp. Uncommon plants occurring in the fen include black bogrush *Schoenus nigricans*, bog pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*, brookweed *Samolus valerandi*, marsh helleborine *Epipactis palustris*, broad-leaved helleborine *E. helleborine*, adder's-tongue *Ophioglossum vulgatum*, and a sub-species of fragrant orchid *Gymnadenia conopsea* ssp. *densiflora*. The stream running along the valley floor contains a population of freshwater crayfish *Austropotamobius pallipes*, a species listed in the International Red Data Book of Invertebrates. The fen supports small clumps of ash, grey willow and aspen which contribute to the breeding habitat for birds such as sedge

warbler, grasshopper warbler and reed bunting.

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At the western end there is a bank of 2 hectares of calcareous grassland dominated by tall brome *Bromus erectus* which has over 120 vascular plant species recorded. These include many which, in Oxfordshire, are typically associated with the Corallian Beds, such as wild liquorice *Astragalus glycyphyllos*, large thyme *Thymus pulegioides*, woolly thistle *Cirsium eriophorum* and bee orchid *Ophrys apifera*. Butterflies associated with the grassland include marbled white *Melanargia galathea* and dark green fritillary *Argynnis aglaia*.

An area of bracken-dominated acid grassland occurs in a small side-valley on the northern slopes. The flora here, which contains many early-flowering species, contrasts notably with the calcareous grassland nearby, and includes lesser chickweed *Stellaria pallida*, early and silver hair-grasses *Aira praecox*, *A. caryophyllea* and early forget-me-not *Myosotis ramosissima*, together with some heather *Calluna vulgaris*.