

COUNTY: SHROPSHIRE  
VALLEY

SITE NAME: EARL'S HILL & HABBERLEY

DISTRICT: Shrewsbury & Atcham

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

Local Planning Authority: SHROPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL, Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council

National Grid Reference: SJ 411048      Area: 58.84 (ha.) 145.4 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheet 1:50,000: 126      1:10,000: SJ 40 NW, SW

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): 1954      Date of Last Revision: 1963

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 1985      Date of Last Revision: –

Other Information:

Boundary alteration (extension and reduction).

Reasons for Notification:

The site consists of a hill of pre-Cambrian rocks and the adjacent wooded valley of the Habberley Brook. It is notable for its wide variety of habitat types, and it includes nationally important geological localities.

The Habberley Brook is a clean fast-flowing stream with characteristic associated invertebrates. The woodland of the valley sides is of particular interest because vegetation types are strongly correlated with variations in geology. Acid pre-Cambrian conglomerates support sessile oak woodland with a ground flora which includes heather *Calluna vulgaris*, bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* and the moss *Leucobryum glaucum*. On base-rich soils, mainly over Ordovician shales, the woodland is dominated by ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, wych elm *Ulmus glabra* and the rare large-leaved lime *Tilia platyphyllos*, with a ground flora which includes dog's mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, soft shield-fern *Polystichum setiferum* and hybrid enchanter's nightshade *Circaea x intermedia*, an uncommon species of north and west Britain.

Much of Earl's Hill is occupied by acidic grassland, dominated by common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina* and wavy hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa*. There are also areas of scrub and bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*. On the eastern side of the hill there are rock faces and areas of scree. Among the less common plants associated with these areas are yellow rock stonecrop *Sedum forsteranum*, shining cranesbill *Geranium lucidum* and bloody cranesbill *Geranium sanguineum* in one of its few Shropshire localities. The short, dry grassland which has developed on thin soils on the south-eastern slope is of particular interest, and contains abundant sheep's bit scabious *Jasione montana*, mouse-ear hawkweed *Hieracium pilosella* and carline thistle *Carlina vulgaris*.

Birds breeding in the area include pied flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca*, green woodpecker *Picus viridis*, buzzard *Buteo buteo*, raven *Corvus corax*, dipper *Cinclus cinclus* and grey wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*.

At the Lyd Hole, there is a nationally important geological locality, where a stream section reveals excellent exposures of a varied suite of Uriconian volcanic rocks and Longmyndian sediments. This locality is of particular importance as one of the few places in the Welsh Borderlands where a contact between Western Uriconian and Longmyndian rocks is exposed. The presence of Uriconian fragments in the Longmyndian sediments at this site strongly suggests that the Western Uriconian rocks pre-date the Longmyndian. The

junction between these two groups is also of considerable historical interest, having been the subject of an intense controversy between a succession of researchers.