

COUNTY: SHROPSHIRE **SITE NAME:** ATTINGHAM PARK

DISTRICT: SHREWSBURY AND 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 and Atcham Borough Council

National Grid Reference: SJ 550096 **Area:** 190.75 (ha.) 471.15 (ac.)

Ordnance Survey Sheets 1:50,000: 126 **1:10,000:** SJ 50 NW
SJ 50 NE
SJ 51 SW
SJ 51 SE

Date Notified (Under 1949 Act): Not Applicable

Date Notified (Under 1981 Act): 22 March 2000

Reasons for Notification:

Attingham Park is of special interest for its rich assemblage of saproxylic invertebrates including many species which are rare in Shropshire and are nationally scarce. These invertebrates are primarily dependent upon the large number of surviving mature and over-mature trees and upon the availability of large quantities of both standing and fallen deadwood within the Park. There are no other ancient parklands within Shropshire with such a diverse invertebrate assemblage and when compared with similar sites within the UK, Attingham Park is considered one of the most important for the conservation of saproxylic invertebrates.

Other Information:

A new site.

Description:

Attingham Park is an ancient parkland situated in the valley of the River Severn at its confluence with the River Tern, immediately to the east of Shrewsbury. The Park, which encompasses open parkland, broadleaved woodland and wetland habitats, lies on gently undulating ground sloping gradually into the floodplain of the River Tern which flows in a southerly direction through the middle of the site. The underlying geology is complex with a superficial cover of boulder clay, glacial and river terrace sands and gravels overlying Triassic sandstones and marls. The soils are similarly variable with freely draining brown earths developed over the sands and gravels and poorly draining gleyed soils over boulder clay and over alluvium in the river floodplain.

The date of origin of the Park is not clear, but is most likely in the 16th or 17th Centuries. Park was extensively re-designed in 1797 by Humphrey Repton and it is this design which survives mostly intact with additional tree planting forming new plantations, shelter belts, and amenity plantings taking place in the early 20th Century. Pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* is most common tree within the Park, but there are also beech *Fagus sylvatica*, ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* and horse chestnut *Aesculus hippocastanum*. Many of the oaks were planted between 120 and 180 years ago, however there are a number which are over 300 years old with the largest tree in excess of 450 years old. These ancient trees occur in the parkland either singly or in small groups and also as single trees within the relatively modern plantations. Large ancient beech trees are also a feature of the site occurring along an old avenue in the northern part of the Park and including several ancient pollards.

An important area of wet woodland occurs alongside the River Tern at the northern end of the Park. The woodland, which is dominated by crack willow *Salix fragilis*, is structurally varied and includes many collapsed trees and abundant deadwood of value for saproxylic invertebrates.

The continuity of parkland and woodland cover at Attingham Park with large and over-mature timber including living and dying wood together with deadwood in various stages of decay has enabled the very specialised saproxylic invertebrate fauna to survive. Such continuity and habitat conditions are now rare within the UK.

The saproxylic fauna recorded at Attingham Park includes numerous species of beetle which are characteristic of and restricted to parkland, wood pasture and relict old forests. Individual species are adapted to very specific conditions within or on the surface of ancient trees and with associated fungi. They include several species of beetle which are nationally scarce such as: the wood boring beetle *Dorcatoma flavicornis* associated with rotten wood; the flat bark beetle *Notolaemus unifasciatus* which survives under the bark of ancient trees; the cobweb beetle *Ctesias serra* which feeds on the remains of insects caught in cobwebs under loose dry bark; the carrion beetle *Abraeus granulum* associated with rotten wood and the silken fungus beetle *Atomaria barani* found in the fruiting bodies of fungi associated with ancient trees.

A number of small ponds and marshes are scattered throughout the site which add to the diversity of habitats in the Park. The site also includes a section of the River Tern which is notable for its well developed aquatic and marginal vegetation as well as for the associated areas of adjacent wet woodland and several mature bankside trees. This section of the river supports otter *Lutra lutra* and a variety of damselflies including banded demoiselle *Calopteryx splendens* and the nationally scarce white-legged damselfly *Platycnemis pennipes*.