

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

## Citation for Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

<b>Name:</b>	Mole Gap to Reigate Escarpment
<b>Unitary Authority/County:</b>	Surrey
<b>SAC status:</b>	Designated on 1 April 2005
<b>Grid reference:</b>	TQ199533
<b>SAC EU code:</b>	UK0012804
<b>Area (ha):</b>	887.68
<b>Component SSSI:</b>	Mole Gap to Reigate Escarpment SSSI

### Site description:

Woodland, chalk grassland, chalk scrub and heathland form an interrelated mosaic at this site on the North Downs.

On the generally acidic plateau deposits of the crest of the Downs, the woodland is dominated by beech *Fagus sylvatica*, pedunculate oak *Quercus robur*, ash *Fraxinus excelsior* and yew *Taxus baccata*. On the lime-rich chalk slopes, the dominant trees are beech, ash and yew, together with field maple *Acer campestre* and common whitebeam *Sorbus aria* agg. and occasional large-leaved lime *Tilia platyphyllos*. Yew woodland has been formed both by invasion of chalk grassland and from development within beech woodland following destruction of the beech over-storey. Yew occurs in extensive stands, with, in places, an understorey of box *Buxus sempervirens*. This site supports the only area of stable box scrub in the UK, on steep chalk slopes where the River Mole has cut into the North Downs Escarpment, creating the Mole Gap. Here natural erosion maintains the open conditions required for the survival of this habitat type.

The site supports a range of species-rich chalk grassland types on steep slopes, dominated by red fescue *Festuca rubra*, sheep's-fescue *F. ovina*, quaking-grass *Briza media* and, in taller areas, upright brome *Bromopsis erecta*, tor-grass *Brachypodium pinnatum* and slender false-brome grass *Brachypodium sylvaticum*. Typical herbs include salad burnet *Sanguisorba minor*, yellow-wort *Blackstonia perfoliata* and field scabious *Knautia arvensis*. The site supports important populations of the nationally scarce musk orchid *Herminium monorchis* and man orchid *Aceras anthropophorum*, the former occurring in areas of shorter turf. A range of more widespread but local orchids are also present, including autumn lady's-tresses *Spiranthes spiralis* and green-winged orchid *Orchis morio*, as well as commoner species, such as pyramidal orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, fragrant orchid *Gymnadenia conopsea* and bee orchid *Ophrys apifera*.

The acidic plateau deposits on Headley Heath support acidic heathland, dominated by heather *Calluna vulgaris*, bell heather *Erica cinerea* and dwarf gorse *Ulex minor*, often mixed with grasses such as wavy hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa* and common bent *Agrostis capillaris*. Chalk heath occurs on a small area of Headley Heath where the special conditions allow both acid and lime-loving plants to grow side by side.

An old chalk mine is used as a winter roost by several species of bats.

**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:

- *Taxus baccata* woods of the British Isles. (Yew-dominated woodland)\*
- *Asperulo-Fagetum* beech forests. (Beech forests on neutral to rich soils)
- European dry heaths
- Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*) (Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone).
- Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies: on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*) (important orchid sites). (Dry grasslands and scrublands on chalk or limestone, including important orchid sites)\*
- Stable xerothermophilous formations with *Buxus sempervirens* on rock slopes (*Berberidion* p.p.). (Natural box scrub)

**Qualifying species:** The site is designated under **article 4(4)** of the Directive (92/43/EEC) as it hosts the following species listed in Annex II:

- Bechstein's bat *Myotis bechsteinii*
- Great crested newt *Triturus cristatus*

Annex I priority habitats are denoted by an asterisk (\*).

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

Register reference number: UK0012804

Date of registration: 14 June 2005

Signed: *Trevor Salmon*

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