



# The Hundred Parishes

## An introductory article about SSSIs – SITES OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST

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Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Natural England can designate any area of land considered to be of special interest by virtue of its fauna, flora or geological features as a “Site of Special Scientific Interest” or SSSI. This designation – often referred to as “triple-S, I” - ensures that the area is appropriately managed and protected. The Hundred Parishes has more than twenty SSSIs. We will mention a few that can be visited.

In the parish of High Easter, Garnett’s Wood comprises 25 hectares (62 acres) of ancient coppiced woodland (meaning the trees have been regularly cut down to ground level). Lime is the dominant tree.

Mentioned in the Domesday Book, this wood was given in the 12th century by Henry II to a knight called Geoffrey Garnett. A tree stump has been carved to depict the knight. He was ‘installed’ in 2023 to replace an earlier carving that had watched over the wood for many years.



Patmore Heath in Albury parish, pictured on the left, is an 8-hectare grass heathland, now a scarce habitat in South East England. It is managed by Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust. A variety of native grasses grow here and the heath’s ponds are home to all three native English newt species: great-crested, smooth and palmate.

Amwell Quarry, formerly an area of gravel pits, has been transformed into a 37-hectare wetland environment, important in particular for wintering wildfowl and regarded as England’s premier site for dragonflies. It is a popular destination for bird-watchers and has several hides, including one shown here.

Hundred Parishes walks 9 and 19 pass beside the reserve.





Best-known of our SSSIs is Hatfield Forest which covers more than 400 hectares, around 1.5 square miles. It was a royal hunting forest from around 1100 AD until the 15th century. Hatfield Forest has been owned by The National Trust since 1924. A small section is shown on the right.



The forest has never been ploughed and has been managed for centuries by coppicing and pollarding.

Hundred Parishes walk number 159 passes through part of Hatfield Forest.

An example of a pollarded tree is shown below on the left – a tree that was cut down to a height above which livestock and deer could not reach the new shoots. Below, on the right is an example of coppicing, in this case a Hatfield Forest oak that was cut down almost to the ground, encouraging new shoots to grow.



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Any comments or suggestions for improvement may be submitted by using the Feedback form on the website. The website has many short articles on various aspects of The Hundred Parishes, as well as introductions to individual parishes and to a number of local celebrities, and an extensive What's On section. More than a hundred walk route descriptions can be freely downloaded, with each of the hundred parishes featuring in at least one walk.