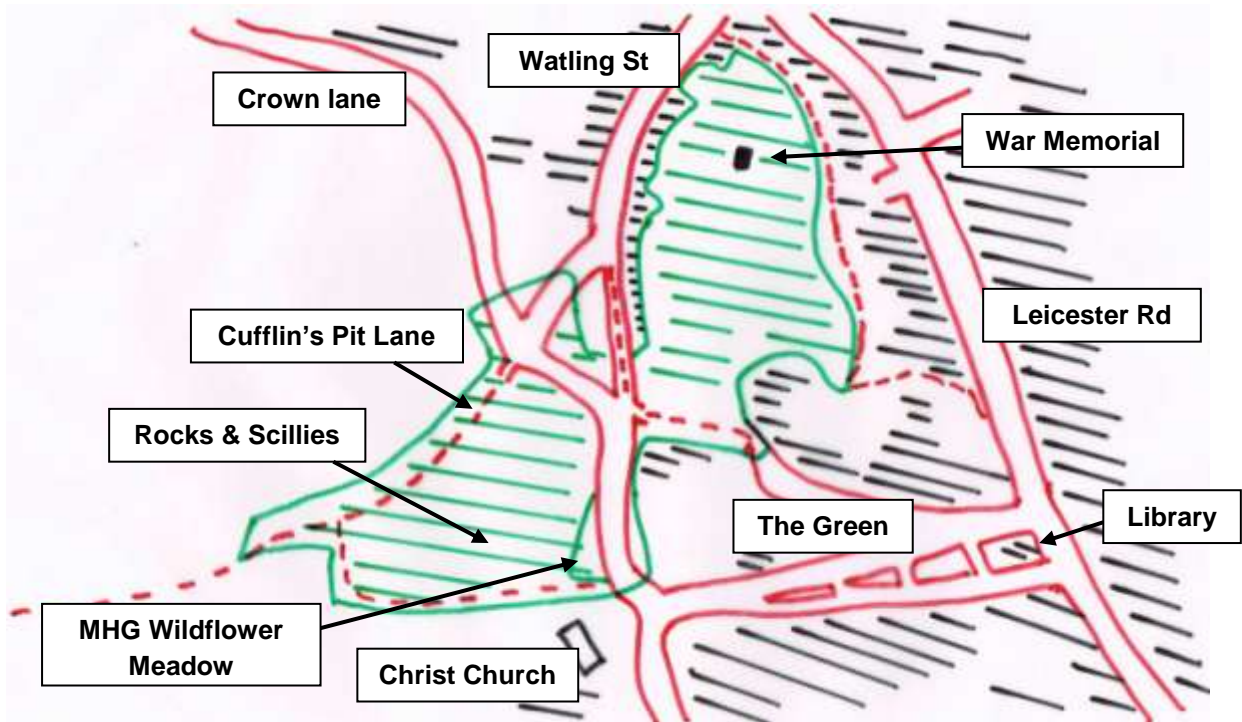


Mountsorrel Wildlife Sites 2016 - Castle Hill



Castle Hill is a notified site of Importance for Nature Conservation/Wildlife Site (CBC Reference CBC W 5814/ 2 [25498] March 2002). It was surveyed in 2002 in relation to the notification. It is essentially Mixed Grassland (Mesotrophic/ Acidic) with rocky outcrops.



Castle Hill – East face of the hill 2016

The whole site includes:

- Castle Hill
- The Navins
- The Rocks and Scillies

On the Navins, adjacent to Christ Church churchyard, is the Wildflower Meadow developed by MHG (See <http://mountsorrelarchive.org/category/wildlife/navins-meadow/>)

The north edge of the site consists of the mass of granite rock, Castle Hill, the site of a Norman castle built by Hugh Lupus and destroyed in mediaeval times. Surmounting this is the village War Memorial built of locally quarried granite. The hill is an important local landmark and provides wide views over the Soar Valley. It is of significant value for wildlife as an example of an acid grassland and rock outcrop mix which was once well-represented in the county both here in Mountsorrel, and also at Croft and Enderby but has now been lost to extensive quarrying.



Castle Hill – looking down the north-east face

Notable wild flowers found here include the rare Subterranean Trefoil. Wild Pansy and Harebell, can be seen in the late summer on the barer areas. The wealth of flowering plants provides valuable feeding and breeding sites for a host of animal and bird species. The yellow male Brimstone butterfly can often be seen in the late

spring as it is drawn to the flowers during its migration, while the diminutive Small Heath can be seen for most of the summer. Finch and tit flocks are often seen in the wooded embankments, particularly in the winter, and in the summer months, swifts, house martins and swallows can be observed feeding over the hill.



Castle Hill – Village War Memorial

In the past, grazing farm stock kept much of the vegetation low but, as this practice ceased, vigorous shrubby species, such as Bramble and Rosebay Willow-herb have invaded some areas to the detriment of the smaller, finer plants.



Cufflin's Pit lane May 2010

Large parts of the site, particularly the steep slopes, are covered by dense bramble scrub which merges into a more established scrub community of hawthorn, elder, dog rose and young ash trees, with occasional garden escapees such as snowberry, buddleia, laburnum and garden privet. There is occasional general clearance work but recently the area below the War Memorial has seen a fairly extensive clearance of the scrub on the main hillside. This clearance work augers well for the notable grassland species and, on the rocky outcrops, interesting mosses, which have survived.



Castle Hill – East face 2016

The ground flora under the scrub consists mainly of patches of nettle, goose-grass and ivy, with small amounts of other shade-tolerant species such as cow parsley, wood avens, male fern, foxglove and woody nightshade.

The less steep areas of more open grassland are regularly strimmed and support a grassland community of perennial rye-grass and common bent. This is generally herb-poor, containing occasional yarrow, common sorrel, red clover, white clover, ragwort and dandelion.



The Navins and outer castle earthworks from Castle Hill 2016

The Navins consists mainly of unmanaged grassland with scattered bramble scrub, and a large block of mature hawthorn scrub. At the southern edge are the rock outcrops of the Rocks and Scillies. These rocks support a similar community to those of Castle Hill itself, with patches of sheep's fescue, squirrel-tail fescue, sheep's sorrel, lady's bedstraw and reflexed stonecrop. Of particular note in this area are small colonies of hoary cinquefoil and crow garlic, both of which grow in soil-filled crevices. Hoary cinquefoil is a Leicestershire Red Data Book species, which is known to occur at only 4 other sites in Leicestershire. Both hoary cinquefoil and crow garlic are also listed on the Leicestershire and Rutland Rare Plant Register.



Rocks and Scillies May 2010

Nearby is a large stand of mature, 5 m high hawthorn scrub, along with young sycamore, and occasional ash, dog rose, holly and elder. The ground flora is dominated by ivy, with patches of nettles and occasional goosegrass, wood avens, cow parsley and hedge woundwort.



Hawthorn and Bramble scrub – Cufflin's Pit lane looking south over the Rocks and Scillies

Species Lists¹

Plantlife

- Autumn Hawkbit (*Leontodon autumnalis*)
- Bird's-foot Trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*)
- Black Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*)
- Cock's-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*)
- Common Bent (*Agrostis capillaris*)
- Common cat's-ear (*Hypochaeris radicata*)
- Common Sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*)
- Couch grass (*Elytrigia repens*)
- Creeping buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*)
- False oat-grass (*Arrhenatherum elatius*)
- Harebell (*Campanula rotundifolia*)
- Hoary Cinquefoil (*Potentilla argentea*) Leicestershire Red Data Book species
- Hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium* ssp *sphondylium*)
- Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*)
- Meadow foxtail (*Alopecurus pratensis*)
- Mouse-ear hawkweed (*Pilosella officinarum*)
- Red Clover (*Trifolium pratense*)
- Reflexed stonecrop, a garden escape (*Sedum rupestre*)
- Ribwort plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*)
- Rosebay willowherb (*Chamerion augustifolium*)
- Sheep's Fescue (*Festuca ovina*)
- Sheep's Sorrel (*Rumex acetosella*)
- Singing nettle (*Urtica dioica* ssp *dioica*)
- Subterranean Clover (*Trifolium subterraneum*) Leicestershire Red Data Book species
- Timothy (*Phleum pratense*)
- Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*)
- Yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*)

Also to be found are Bryophytes, including the moss *Campylopus introflexus* and a species of *Polytrichum*.

Butterflies

- Brimstone (*Gonepteryx rhamni*)
- Gatekeeper (*Pyronia Cecilia*)
- Holly Blue (*Celastrina argiolus*)
- Meadow brown *Maniola jurtina*)

¹ Species lists are drawn from Charnwood Borough Council Wildlife Surveys and MHG Member Records

- Ringlet (*Aphantopus hyperantus*)
- Speckled Wood (*Pararge aegeria*)

Invertebrates

- Brown Hawker Dragonfly (*Aeshna grandis*)
- Garden orb-web spider (*Araneus diadematus*)
- Grasshopper (*Chorthippus parallelus*)
- Harvestmen (*Opiolones*)
- Wolf Spider (*Pardosa Amentata*)

Birds

Given the proximity of Broad Hill the species listed there will also be seen in and around Castle Hill and the Navins.