

LOCAL WILDLIFE SITE (LWS)

West Sussex

Site Name:	Elmer Rocks		
Site Ref:	Ar18	Owner:	Private
District:	Arun	Size (ha):	20.1
Parish:	Climping & Middleton-on-Sea	Date:	Identified Dec 2003
National Grid Ref:	SZ986999	Author:	Simon Curson
Habitat:	Intertidal sand and shingle, vegetated shingle and off-shore rocks		

Summary

Elmer beach is a fine example of vegetated shingle, an internationally rare habitat. The intertidal area supports a diverse community including intertidal sand and eight 'rock islands' constructed in the early 1990s in the mid-tide zone to form a coastal defence against the eroding coastline. The rock islands have provided a habitat type that is very rare, if not unique, in West Sussex. The rock pools are probably the best in the county.

Site description

The shingle beach, protected by the rock islands, is reasonably stable and supports a diverse flora. At Elmer it includes several notable species such as Long-headed Poppy *Papaver dubium*, Babington's Orache *Atriplex glabriuscula*, Sea Fern grass *Catapodium marinum*, Sand Couch *Elytrigia juncea*, Sea Kale *Crambe maritima*, Yellow-horned Poppy *Glaucium flavium*, Rough Clover *Trifolium scabrum*, Sea Radish *Raphanus raphanistrum maritimum*, Sand Cats-tail *Phleum arenarium* and Tree Mallow *Lavatera arborea* as well as a variety of other coastal species. This is the only known West Sussex site for Little Robin *Geranium purpureum*, a rare plant. The Toadflax Brocade moth breeds here. Ringed Plovers attempt to nest in most years and many waders feed in the intertidal area. The vegetated shingle is an important winter source of invertebrates and seed for local birds such as Stonechat, Linnet, Greenfinch and, occasionally, Black Redstart.

The intertidal rock islands are constructed of Norwegian granite blocks and stand 3 or 4 metres high. The structure of the islands and varied orientation of the blocks provide all the aspects of a typical intertidal, rocky shore habitat. A good variety of red, brown and green algae can be found. Shore Crab *Carcinus maenus* and Prawns *Palaemon serratus* are abundant in the rock pools. This is the only site in West Sussex, and the furthest east along the English Channel coast, for Purple Topshell *Gibbula umbilicalis*. Other common species include Common Limpet *Patella vulgaris*, Snakelocks Anemone *Anemonia viridis* and Breadcrumb Sponge *Halichondria panicea*. A variety of fish are found in and around the breakwaters including Corkwing Wrasse *Crenilabrus melops* and Bass *Dicentrarchus labrax*. The rock islands are used as a roost site for a number of shore birds such as Oystercatcher, Cormorant and a variety of gulls.

Intertidal sand accumulates behind the rock islands and has resulted in the beach level here being higher than on the seaward side. Other species include Sand Mason *Lanice conchilega*, Brown Shrimp *Crangon crangon*, Little Cuttlefish *Sepiolo atlantica*, Dover Sole *Solea solea* and Flounder *Pleuronectes flesus*.

Management recommendations

Main threats to the vegetated shingle are from householders' garden waste/bonfires and from any future coastal defence work. Although some coastal defence work might be required in the future, this should be done with sensitivity towards the ecological interest. The practice of dumping and burning garden waste on the beach should be stopped. The intensity of bait-collecting should be monitored as large-scale collecting could be harmful to populations of bait species, such as Lugworm and Shore Crab, and so reduce the food supply for fish and shore birds.

Site: Ar18 - Elmer Rocks



Key to Map:
 Local Wildlife Site
 Neighbouring Local Wildlife Site

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