

# What's in it for you?

The heaths of Surrey, Hampshire and Berkshire are fantastic for recreation, are incredibly important for health and wellbeing and contribute to a healthy environment.

- The **Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area** is legally protected and cannot be built on. It's the nesting birds that give the land its legal protection. By looking after the birds, we can all play our part in making sure the protection stays in place.
- The heaths are large, beautiful open spaces that you and your family can enjoy exploring on foot, with the dog or on horseback, to keep fit, healthy and enjoy the great outdoors.
- Being outdoors has a positive impact on happiness and wellbeing, can improve your immune system and even lower your blood pressure.
- The heaths improve local air quality, water quality, help regulate the climate and reduce flooding.
- The heaths are home to a host of wildlife that people of all ages can enjoy and learn about. Why not ask one of our wardens for an information leaflet or ask them to help you identify something you've seen.

## Make the connection

The heaths are protected for the rare birds that nest here. Keeping to main paths and helping to prevent fires is the best way to protect the birds and in turn make sure the heaths are protected for people to enjoy.

*It's easy and everyone can help.*

## Local country walks across Surrey, Hampshire & Berkshire!

Our **FREE Greenspace on your doorstep** directory lists over 70 dog-friendly, safe and sociable circular walks. Places where dogs can roam off-lead without disturbing wildlife.

All entries have at least 2 hours free parking. Many have poo bins and surfaced paths. They're well worth seeking out!



To find a greenspace on your own doorstep, visit [tbhpartnership.org.uk/greenspace](http://tbhpartnership.org.uk/greenspace) or ask one of our wardens for a **FREE** booklet.

#GreenspaceOnYourDoorstep

## Heathland Hounds

**Happy hounds... healthy heaths!**

Celebrate the joy of dog walking across the Thames Basin Heaths and be the first to hear about new **Greenspace on your doorstep!**

We're really proud of our interactive dog walking community and want Heathland Hounds to be the best group around. We're sharing fun and useful information across Surrey, Hampshire and Berkshire! We value community and listen to what you need! It's **FREE**, so why not join in?



Enjoy the Thames Basin Heaths with your dog. Heathland Hounds thank all responsible dog owners for following the **Good dog guide**.

[tbhpartnership.org.uk/heathland-hounds/good-dog-guide](http://tbhpartnership.org.uk/heathland-hounds/good-dog-guide)

- facebook.com/groups/HeathlandHounds
- twitter.com/HeathlandHounds
- instagram.com/heathlandhounds



## How can I help?

Keep to main paths March to September to reduce the risk of disturbing rare birds that nest in vegetation on the ground.

Keep dogs out of vegetation to give chicks the best chance of survival.

**Please, no fires or BBQs, ensure cigarettes are out and take all litter home.**



Help us spread the word. Tell your family, friends and neighbours what the heaths mean to you and why they're worth looking after.



If you'd like to make a difference and get your hands dirty, find out more about volunteering opportunities at: [tbhpartnership.org.uk/volunteering](http://tbhpartnership.org.uk/volunteering)

**Thank you & enjoy your visit!**

## Discover the magic of the Thames Basin Heaths



[tbhpartnership.org.uk](http://tbhpartnership.org.uk)

[facebook.com/thamesbasinheathspartnership](https://facebook.com/thamesbasinheathspartnership)

[twitter.com/TBHPartnership](https://twitter.com/TBHPartnership)

[instagram.com/tbhpartnership](https://instagram.com/tbhpartnership)

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## Welcome to the magic of the Thames Basin Heaths!

You might not think of busy south-east England as a hotspot for rare wildlife, but it really is! By a fluke of nature it has the perfect geology and climate for a very special wildlife habitat: **Heathland**. If you've taken your local heath for granted, think again, this heather-clad landscape is rarer than rainforest!

Much probably goes unnoticed, but a closer look reveals a magical world inhabited by iridescent beetles, weird-looking wasps, beautiful butterflies, shy reptiles, carnivorous plants and some very special birds.

Heathland birds are not part of the common-or-garden flock. And because a heath, by its very nature, is covered in low-growing shrubs, that's where special birds like the Nightjar, Woodlark and Dartford Warbler nest. On or near the ground, in amongst the heather and gorse.

Much of the magic happens at twilight. You could walk on the heaths every day and not see our favourite bird, the Nightjar. But visit at dusk on a summer evening, and you'll hear the strange, mechanical churring of the males, and maybe even catch a mesmerising glimpse. Astoundingly, they come all the way from Africa to nest here on our heaths.

You might think that nesting on the ground would make for a precarious existence, but these birds have been living and breeding alongside us for centuries. Only in recent years has their vulnerability become an issue.

Thousands of years ago heathland covered vast areas, but it's shrunk dramatically in the last two centuries. It's now more important than ever for us to act together to protect this precious and fragile landscape for the future. In 2005 the heaths (*see map overleaf*) became the **Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area** and our warden team is here to help you connect with, protect and enjoy it for years to come!

## Is wildfire such an issue?

# Yes!

Wildfire is a major threat to heathland. It spreads fast, destroying everything in its path.



Amongst that destruction will be chicks and eggs, snakes, lizards, small mammals, dragonflies and butterflies. Vegetation burns quickly, with vast areas consumed in all directions.

Fire puts the lives of people in danger and nearby houses and businesses in jeopardy.

## Help prevent fires

No fires or BBQs, ensure cigarettes are out and take all litter home.

## Know what to do

Swift action is vital and all fires, no matter how small, should be reported to 999.

- 1 Get to a safe place
- 2 Note the location of the fire
- 3 Call 999 and ask for the Fire & Rescue Service
- 4 Give as much information as you can
- 5 If requested, meet the Fire & Rescue Service at the entrance

#BeWildfireAware



## Our Amazing Heathlands



**FREE** curriculum-linked education sessions for local schools. On the heath, in the classroom, in your school grounds, or remotely!

**Teachers! Why not explore the curriculum through a fascinating world of butterflies, ground-nesting birds and carnivorous plants in a habitat rarer than rainforest?**

## Activities and challenges!

Students become heathland scientists and hunt for minibeasts and plants as they discover how heathland has been used throughout history, learn how this fragile landscape is under threat and what we can all do to protect it.

Take your curriculum learning out of the classroom and reap the benefits of being outside in nature. It's also a whole lot of fun!

For more information, go to: [tbhpartnership.org.uk/schools](http://tbhpartnership.org.uk/schools) or email: [tbhschools@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:tbhschools@naturalengland.org.uk)

#OurAmazingHeathlands



Visit our website for lots of **FREE downloadable** activities for kids.



Join us in July for Heath Week! Loads of **FREE** activities. Details on the website.

#MoreThanJustNightjars



# Top species to see

## How many can you spot?

### Heather

During the summer months, heathland transforms into a purple wonderland. Three types of heather, Ling (pictured), Bell Heather and Cross-leaved Heath, all add their own distinct hue to the mauve spectacular. Historically, heather's been used for bedding, to make brushes, woven into baskets and as a source of fuel.



### Silver-studded Blue

Characterised by small silver-blue dots on the underside of the hind wings, the Silver-studded Blue is the standout butterfly of our lowland heaths. Usually found fluttering over short-cropped track-side heather from late May into August, the males are blue with a distinctive black band around the edges of the upper wings, whilst the females are usually brown. This species has a special relationship with ants, who are persuaded to protect developing caterpillars in exchange for sweet, sticky secretions.



### Smooth Snake

These elusive snakes are restricted to heathland in the south of England and are our rarest reptile. Active from spring to early autumn, they're incredibly secretive, hardly ever basking out in the open where you might find other snakes. As the name suggests, Smooth Snakes are smooth, and don't have a keel on their scales like other snakes. They're matt grey or brown and rarely reach more than 70cm.



### Cattle and other livestock

Belted Galloway cattle, goats, Icelandic or New Forest ponies and other livestock are used to help keep the heaths healthy. They graze scrub and grasses that would otherwise out-compete the heathland plants. This creates a diverse mosaic of habitats that benefit heathland residents of all shapes and sizes.



### Grayling

Now you see me, now you don't! The Grayling's cryptic colouring allows it to simply disappear right in front of your eyes when settled. In order to regulate its temperature, a Grayling will angle itself to get more or less sun - this also enables it to minimize its shadow and further camouflage itself from view. They can be found along dry, sandy tracks from July to September and are very territorial - often flying directly at passers-by.



### Emperor Dragonfly

The UK's largest dragonfly can usually be found flying between June and August. Their large size, apple-green thorax and curved abdomen in flight are good indicators that you're in the presence of an Emperor. They rarely stop patrolling the skies - often eating and mating on the wing. With patience, however, you may find one perched for a moment.



### Stonechat

If you hear the sound of two pebbles being knocked together on the heath, you may be in the presence of a calling Stonechat. These Robin-sized birds can be spotted all year round as they often perch conspicuously on the top of low scrub. A birdwatcher's dream!



### Tormentil

Flowering low to the ground between May and September, this bright yellow four-petalled plant can be encountered along heathland tracks. Throughout these months Tormentil is an ever-present source of nectar for bees.



### Sand Lizard

Of the UK's three native lizards, the Sand Lizard is by far the rarest. It's also the only one of the three to lay eggs - the others incubate internally. These lizards require a combination of mature heather and open, sandy habitats to live and breed. In the breeding season (late-April to May), the males turn an unmistakeable bright green.



### Gorse

Gorse is a prickly evergreen shrub bearing bright yellow coconut-scented flowers. Its waxy leaves reduce water loss in dry conditions and form prickles to protect it from hungry animals. It can flower for most of the year.



### European Nightjar

Each year the Nightjar returns from sub-Saharan Africa to breed on our heaths and newly planted forestry plantations, where it makes its nest in a simple scrape on the ground. Nightjars are nocturnal and their churring calls (which can contain up to 1900 notes per minute!) can be heard in suitable habitat from dusk. They were once known as goat suckers, as villagers thought they fed on the milk of their livestock. However, it was the insects the Nightjars were after.



### Black Darter

These aerobic maestros can be seen on the wing between June and October and the males are readily identifiable as being the UK's only black dragonfly. Of all our resident dragonflies, the Black Darter is the smallest.



### Golden-ringed Dragonfly

The Golden-ringed Dragonfly is stunningly beautiful with bright yellow rings down the entire body and iridescent green eyes. Our longest dragonfly, it's often found flying near to acidic streams on heathland between May and September.



### Dartford Warbler

The Dartford Warbler is a species tied to our lowland heaths. These secretive warblers rely on gorse to find food (they feed on the insects and spiders found there) and for shelter from the elements in winter. They nest low down in thick gorse or dense heather. Historically, the Dartford Warbler was known as the 'Furze Wren' - Furze being the old English name for gorse.



### Sundew

Sundews (such as the Round-leaved Sundew, pictured) are small and beautiful bog plants found in wet areas of the heath. They live in acidic, nutrient-poor soil and, to supplement their diet, these plants catch unsuspecting insects attracted to and trapped by a glistening sticky liquid on their hairy leaves. The victims are then slowly digested.



### Woodlark

The beautiful, melancholic song of the Woodlark heralds the start of spring on the heaths



and inspired many poets, including Gerard Manley Hopkins and Robbie Burns. Woodlarks nest on the ground, excavating a shallow scrape to build their nest in. Some stay in the UK all year round, while others opt to overwinter on the continent.



### Common Lizard

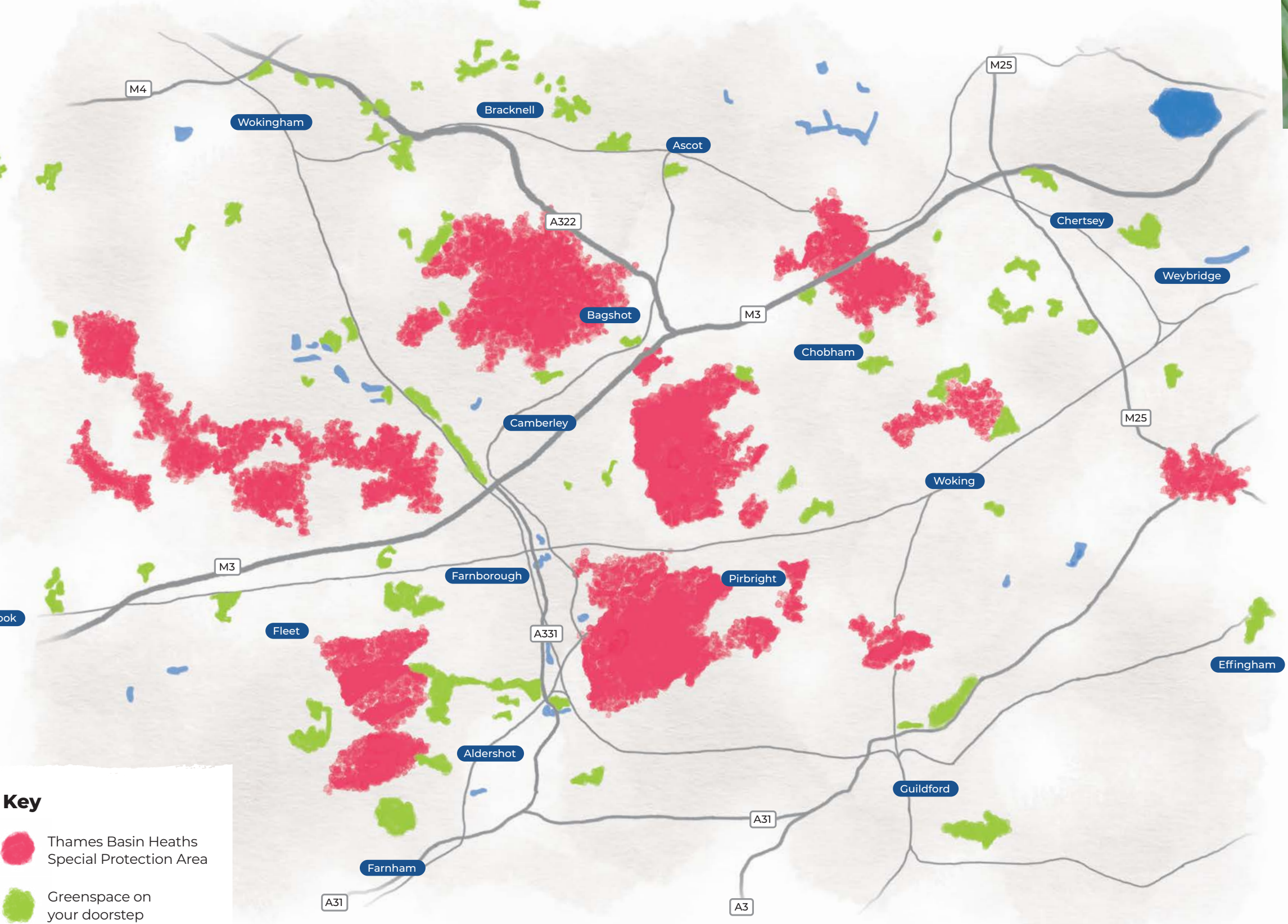
Of all our native reptiles, you're most likely to encounter the Common Lizard. They frequently bask in the sunshine on paths, logs and boardwalks. Rather than laying eggs, Common Lizards incubate internally and give birth to live young - this is why they're also known as viviparous lizards.

### Green Tiger Beetle

Using their long legs and imposing jaws to dash after and catch other invertebrates for dinner, Green Tiger Beetles are a force to be reckoned with. They're most likely to be encountered throughout the spring and summer, on sunny days along sandy tracks. However, because of their speed, these beetles often disappear before you even realise they're there.



Reading



Key

- Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area
- Greenspace on your doorstep