

Top species to see

How many can you spot?

Brimstone

Male brimstone butterflies are a cheerful bright yellow, whilst females are much paler. In its adult stage it is Britain's longest-lived butterfly, living up to a year and hibernating during winter deep in ivy or other evergreen shrubs. Brimstones lay their eggs on alder buckthorn or common buckthorn.



Common 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 all-year round.



Stonechat

If you hear the sound of two pebbles being clunked together on the heath, you may be in the presence of a calling stonechat. These robin-sized birds can be easily spotted all year round as they often perch conspicuously on the top of low scrub.



Black Darter

These aerobatic 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.



Sand Lizard

Of Britain's three native lizards, the sand lizard is by far the rarest. It is 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 and in the breeding season (late April to May), the males turn an unmistakable bright green.



Emperor Dragonfly

Britain's largest dragonfly can usually be found flying between June and August. Their large size, apple green thorax and curved abdomen whilst in flight are good indicators that you are in the presence of an emperor. They rarely stop patrolling the skies – often eating and mating on the wing. The best chance to get a good look is when the female lays her eggs (as pictured).



Heather

During the summer months, the Thames Basin Heaths is transformed into a purple wonderland. Three types of heather, common (or ling), bell and cross-leaved heath all add their own distinct hue to the mauve spectacular. Historically, heather has been used for bedding, to make brushes, woven into baskets and as a source of fuel.



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 either 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.



Golden Ringed Dragonfly

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



Dartford Warbler

The Dartford warbler is a species tied to our lowland heathlands. These secretive warblers rely on gorse for food (they feed on the insects found there) and for shelter from the elements over winter. They nest in thick gorse as well as in dense heather. Historically, the Dartford warbler was known as the furze wren – furze being an old English term for gorse.



Sundew

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



Common Lizard

Of all our native reptiles, you are 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 them internally and give birth to live young – this is why they are also known as viviparous lizards.



Woodlark

The beautiful, melancholic song of the woodlark heralds the start of spring on the heathlands and has inspired many poets, such as Gerard Manley Hopkins and Robbie Burns. Woodlarks nest on the ground, excavating a shallow scrape to build their nest in. They are often found nesting in cleared areas of forestry plantation.



Adder

Adders can be easily recognised by a dark, continuous zigzag stripe along their backs. They are the UK's only venomous snake, but are placid creatures unless directly threatened and often slide into the undergrowth when they sense an approach. Adders are active from March to October, after which they return to their hibernacula to spend the winter.



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.



Nightjar

Each year the nightjar returns from sub-Saharan Africa to breed on our heaths and newly planted forestry areas, where it makes its nest on 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 were feeding on the milk of their livestock. However, it was the insects the nightjars were after.



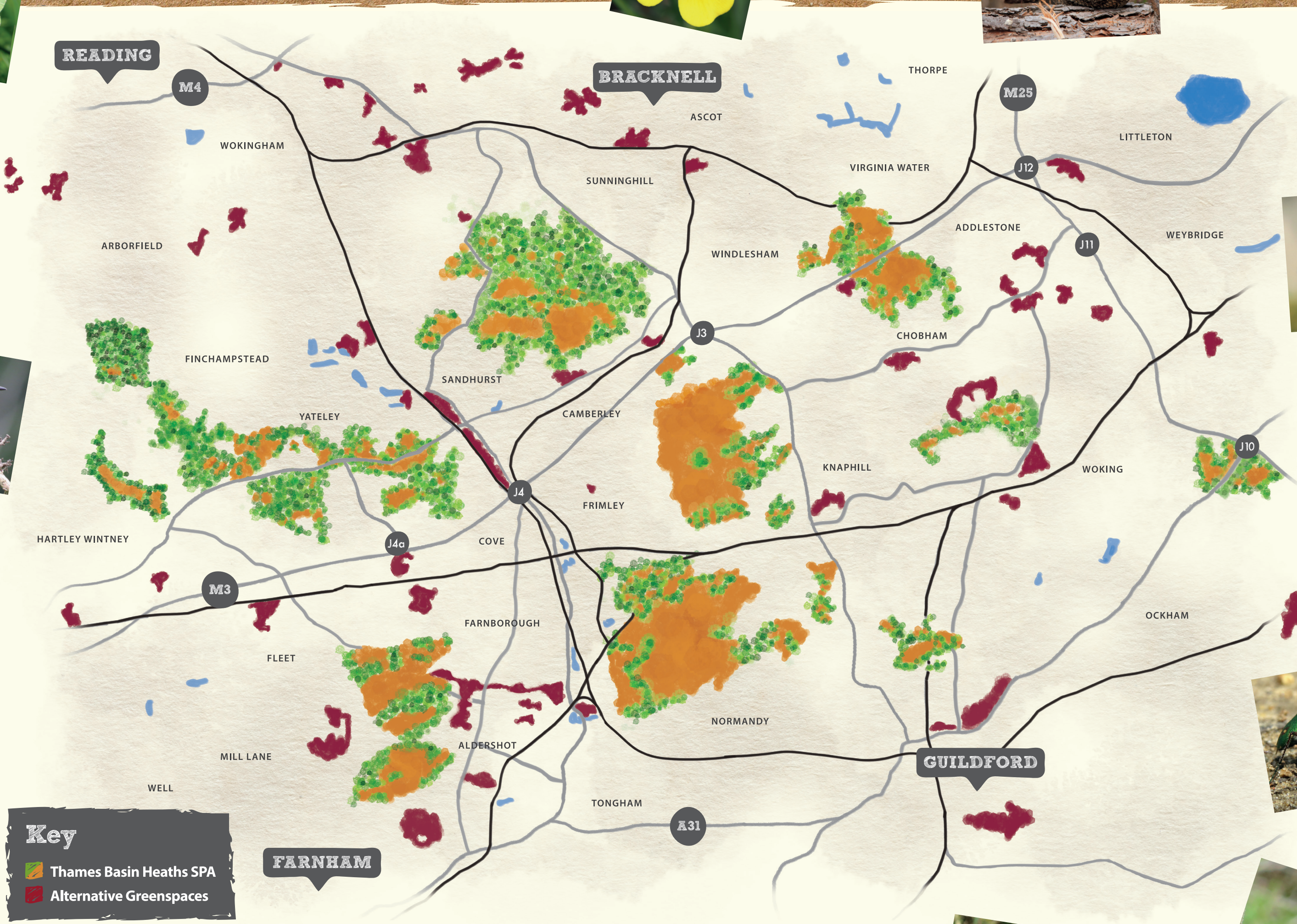
Tormentil

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.



Silver-Studded Blue

Characterised by small silver-blue dots on the underside of the hind-wing, the silver-studded blue is the standout butterfly of our lowland heathlands. Usually found fluttering over short-cropped path-side heather in July and August, they rarely move more than twenty metres away from where they emerged in their lifetime. On the upper side, the males are blue with a distinctive black band around the edges of the wings, whilst the females are usually brown.



What's in it FOR YOU?

As well as being a fantastic place for wildlife, the heaths are an incredibly important resource for health and wellbeing and are a valuable natural asset, contributing to a healthy environment.

- They are large, beautiful open spaces where you and your family can enjoy rambling, dog walking, horse riding, jogging and many more activities helping you to keep fit and healthy.
- They have a positive impact on your happiness and wellbeing. This can improve your immune function and decrease your blood pressure.
- They improve the quality of air and water, help to regulate the climate, clean our air and reduce flooding.

The Thames Basin Heaths is worth taking care of. It retains its protected SPA status purely due to the presence of the rare bird populations. To ensure these heathlands remain protected it is in everyone's interest to look after these rare birds. As they nest on the ground they are extremely vulnerable and easily disturbed, and therefore **need everyone's help.**

- They provide a home for an engaging array of wildlife that all ages can watch, explore and learn about. Why not ask one of our wardens for an information leaflet about other species that live on the heath, get them to help you identify wildlife that you see or ask them about our education programme?
- The presence of the heathland Special Protection Area (SPA) ensures that this space cannot be built on. This protects the value of existing housing and retains this fantastic open space for communities to enjoy both now and into the future.

Our project is a partnership between **26 different organisations:** landowners and managers, local and county councils, charities and government organisations.

Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust	Hart District Council	Rushmoor Borough Council
Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership	Hampshire County Council	Surrey County Council
Bracknell Forest Borough Council	Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust	Surrey Heath Borough Council
Defence Infrastructure Organisation Service Delivery South East	Heathland Conservation Society	Surrey Heathland Project
Elmbridge Borough Council	Horsell Common Preservation Society	Surrey Wildlife Trust
Forestry Commission	Natural England	The Crown Estate
Guildford Borough Council	Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead	Waverley Borough Council
	RSPB	Woking Borough Council
	Runnymede Borough Council	Wokingham Borough Council
		2Js Ecology

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 Michael Jones - Sundew
 Michael Jones - Common Lizard
 Michael Jones - Adder
 Martin D'Arcy - Woodlark
 Michael Jones - Emperor Dragonfly
 Michael Jones - Golden Ringed Dragonfly
 Michael Jones - Grayling
 Michael Jones - Livestock Martin
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Thames Basin Heaths

One of the most important wildlife sites in Europe



Welcome!

The Thames Basin Heaths is an amazing place, made up of fragments of heathland and woodland habitats spanning over 8,200 hectares across Surrey, Hampshire and Berkshire.

It is one of the most important wildlife sites in Europe, and **provides a home for some of Britain's rarest breeding bird species:** Dartford warbler, nightjar and woodlark. Due to the presence of these iconic birds the Thames Basin Heaths is **designated as a 'Special Protection Area' (SPA)**. These rare birds depend on the heathland habitat, and build their nests either on the ground or close to it. The Thames Basin Heaths is also home to a range of other rare native wildlife, including sand lizards, sundews and silver-studded blue butterflies, plus a whole host of other amazing creatures from adders to roe deer.

Thousands of years ago, heathland covered vast areas of southern England. In the last century alone the Thames Basin Heaths has shrunk by 53%, and the pressure is increasing as new homes are built to meet the housing demand. The population within 5km of the SPA is set to rise

further in the next few years as the 50,000 houses that have been planned between 2006 and 2026 are built. This means it is now more important than ever for us to act together to protect this precious and fragile resource. We are here to inspire visitors to take ownership of these special places and engage in their conservation, reconnecting users of the heathland with nature. With your help and input, we can preserve the rare wildlife and ensure the heaths can be enjoyed by everyone for generations to come.



Are there less sensitive places to explore?

Across Hampshire, Berkshire and Surrey there are now over 50 open spaces that have been specially created or enhanced to provide people with a diverse range of outdoor sites to explore and enjoy, whilst helping to keep communities green. These sites are also referred to as Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs). They are designed to offer you more choice and flexibility should you want to visit less sensitive sites away from the SPA, where there is freedom to roam and where dogs can walk off-lead all year round. These places all offer something different and exciting, making taking the children out or walking the dog a new adventure.

To find an alternative greenspace near you, visit www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/sites or ask one of our wardens for a handy booklet!

How can you HELP?

You can really make a difference by keeping on the main paths between March 1st and September 15th, which is the time when our rare birds are nesting on the ground. We'd also like to thank all visitors for not littering, and remembering to not bring BBQs or light any fires. We also thank all horse riders for keeping to the main riding routes. If you would like to get more involved and get your hands dirty, a number of our partners offer practical volunteering opportunities, including path maintenance, infrastructure repairs, habitat improvement, wildflower planting, surveying and species monitoring work. More information can be found on our website at www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/volunteering



Enjoying the Thames Basin Heaths with your dog.

Walkers and their dogs are very welcome on the Thames Basin Heaths. To ensure that all visitors have a great time, dogs are kept safe and wildlife is protected, we would like to thank dog walkers for:

Staying on paths between March 1st - September 15th
 Dogs love exploring, but there are very rare birds that nest on the ground in the vegetation off the path, and these are easily frightened away from their nest.

unintentionally by people and dogs. Keeping to paths helps prevent this, and also helps guard against adder and tick bites. Throwing a ball down the track rather than out into the heath can really help.

Following requests on signs.

The Thames Basin Heaths has a number of different land owners and managers. To keep you and your dog safe, and to protect wildlife and livestock please follow any requests on signs.

Keeping dogs in sight and close by your side, or alternatively on a lead

September 15th. Some dogs are content trotting along the path by your side, but many can't resist frolicking off the track! If your dog is not a path-plodder, or does not reliably follow your command, we recommend walking them on their lead during the nesting season.

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Why not check out 'Heathland Hounds' a free to join community for local dog walkers in the Thames Basin area. **Heathland Hounds** champions responsible dog ownership, and features about your local heaths, information about your local heaths, competitions and events! Visit www.facebook.com/groups/HeathlandHounds

Thank you!