

It's Spring

Hampstead Heath: *Discover, enjoy, and protect its remarkable biodiversity*

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This year Hampstead Heath celebrates its 150th anniversary as a protected space. It remains a piece of British countryside in the centre of a metropolis. With over ten million visitors a year, its wildlife and habitats are under pressure from increasing use, climate change and urban pollution. Help us to protect the Heath and keep it a sanctuary for nature and people.

Caring for the Heath: what we all can do!

The City of London and English Heritage manage these habitats to promote biodiversity. You can help too! Spring is the main bird nesting season. When in the woods, please stick to paths and keep your dogs under control, so as not to disturb nesting birds or resting hedgehogs. When in meadows, please do not disturb shrubby meadow margins or anthills.

Fences are few, and are there to protect fragile habitats. Please respect them. Dead hedging, creating a natural fence with fallen branches, is used to protect ancient trees and to discourage people from making new trails, trampling wildflowers and disturbing sensitive habitats. Please don't cross or remove dead hedges.

Frogs spawning

Over a thousand Common Frog breed every Spring in our pools and ponds. Like the Heath's wetland invertebrates and breeding waterside birds, improved planting around ponds and limiting access to ponds by dogs has been beneficial to their success.



Common Frog
Photo: Adrian Brooker



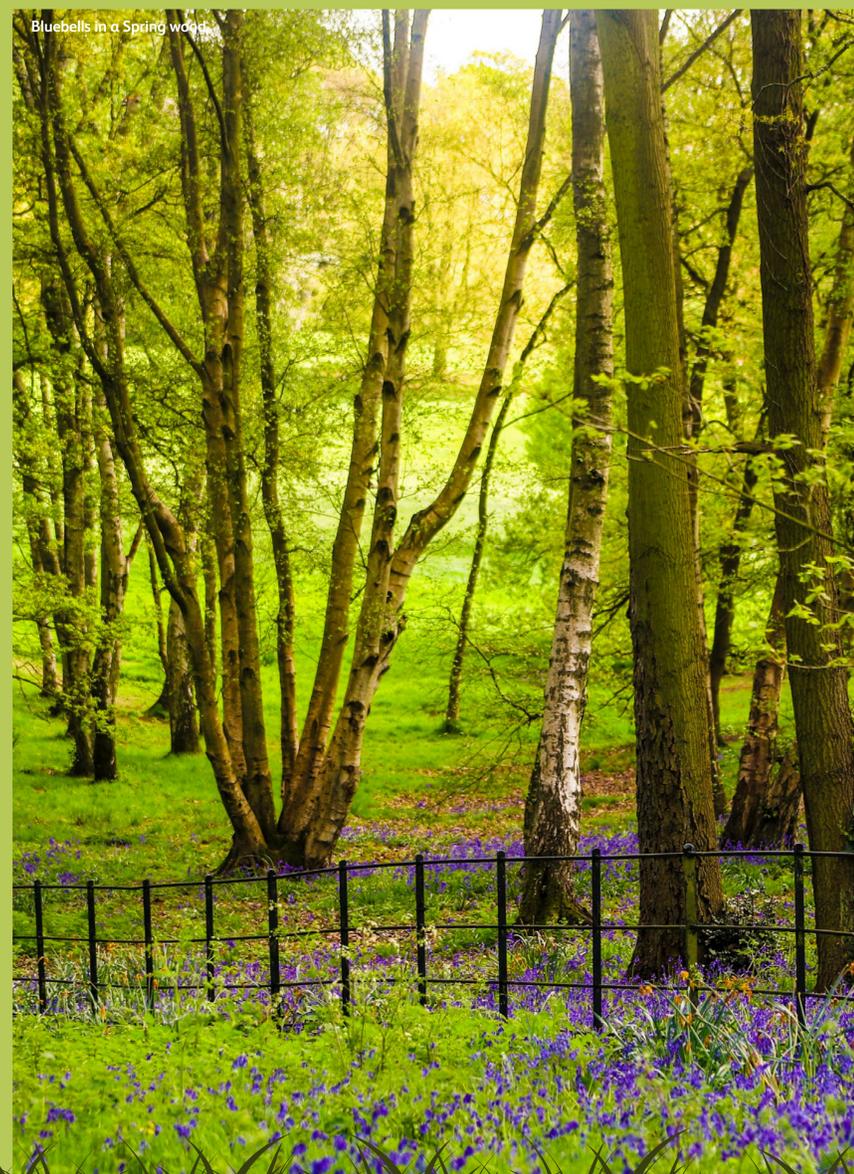
Great Spotted Woodpecker
Photo: Matt Moran



Green Woodpecker
Photo: Matt Moran

Two Woodpeckers

Woodpeckers are drilling their nest holes. Great Spotted Woodpeckers forage on tree limbs, and make a sharp "chip" call. The Green Woodpecker has a yaffling call, and feeds on the ground on ants. Damage to anthills by people and dogs threatens its survival on the Heath.



Bluebells in a Spring wood
Photo: Adrian Brooker

Thrushes, our Spring songsters

Three thrushes, Blackbird, Song Thrush and Mistle Thrush, nest on the Heath. Numbers of the last two are declining nationally. Song Thrush have a loud song, made of much-repeated phrases, while the Mistle Thrush sing a clear, simple song from the tallest tree-tops.

Warblers from the South

Warblers return from Africa in April. Blackcaps sing a melodious song from bushes. Chiffchaffs sing a song just like their name, from high in trees. The Whitethroat, breeding in only a few spots on the Heath, sings a raspy song from brambly meadow edges.



Song Thrush
Photo: Adrian Brooker



Mistle Thrush
Photo: Adrian Brooker



Blackcap
Photo: Adrian Brooker



The Heath &
Hampstead Society

Est. 1897

Registered Charity

For over a century, the Heath & Hampstead Society has fought to protect the Heath for visitors and for nature. With our partners, we celebrate the Heath's 150th year with this seasonally changing display. For more information, visit www.heathandhampstead.org.uk



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It's Summer

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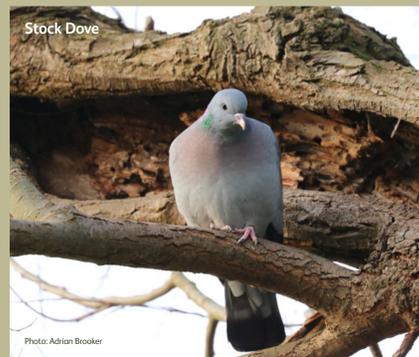
Caring for the Heath: what we all can do!

The City of London and English Heritage manage these habitats to promote biodiversity. Long grass and wildflower meadows provide homes for insects and food for birds. Help protect them by keeping your walks to mown "desire lines" and picnicking in short grass areas, leaving the long grass for the creepy crawlies.

We love to let our dogs take a dip in the ponds. But dog swimming disturbs sediments and introduces poisons from flea treatments, both of which can harm dragonflies and other species. To help our pond life, please swim dogs only in designated dog swimming areas.

Ken Wood, a Site of Special Scientific Interest

When Humphry Repton designed the landscape of Kenwood House in 1793, one of his principles was to improve the natural scenery while "making the whole appear the production of nature only". At the edge of Repton's splendid landscape lies an even more natural space, Ken Wood. This ancient woodland has trees over 400 years old. Their many holes are home to protected bats and distinctive hole-nesting birds. Listen for the repeated "hwoo" of Stock Doves in the treetops and the barks of Jackdaws, small relatives of crows, who have a colony in the Wood. Ring-necked Parakeets also breed in Ken Wood's trees.



Summer butterflies

Butterfly numbers have declined dramatically across Britain. New wildflower meadows are helping to restore and protect them on the Heath. The Common Blue lays its eggs on the yellow-flowered Birdsfoot Trefoil. It is one of more than 20 butterfly species you can see here.

Dragonflies over ponds

Our ponds support 16 species of dragonfly and damselfly. Hawkers patrol pond edges, while Darters hunt from pondside perches.

Kestrels over meadows

In Summer, watch young kestrels hover over meadows, learning to hunt mice and voles.



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It's Autumn

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Caring for the Heath: what we all can do!

The City of London and English Heritage manage these habitats to promote biodiversity. As winter approaches dead wood provides homes and food for many species. Please help by not moving around fallen branches and decaying logs.

Why not try increasing biodiversity in your own neighbourhood? Encouraging wildlife and wildflowers in your own garden, window box or local park will help to create green corridors, linking wildlife habitats across to the Heath and other green spaces in London.

Death by a million footfalls

As more people walk on the Heath, footpaths become so compacted that water cannot penetrate and key soil organisms disappear. With roots starved of water, oxygen and food, pathside trees slowly die. To protect trees, dead hedges are put around them. Please keep to the paths and don't make new ones.

Autumn fungi

Where Heath soils are not compacted they develop a network of subterranean fungi that connect and nourish tree roots. Most send up fruiting bodies in Autumn. The Heath has over 650 species of fungi including some nationally rare species.

Tawny Owls

Around October, you will hear Tawny Owls beginning to call across the Heath around sunset, which they will do until Spring. The Heath supports between five and ten pairs of this nationally declining bird. These nocturnal hunters feed on mice, voles and rats.

Original heathland habitats

In the 1800s, acid grassland, gorse and heather covered much of the Heath. Only fragments of these habitats survive, and their careful management supports rare species, including mining bees and spiders that burrow in their sandy soils. The Ivy Mining Bee is active in Autumn, and feeds on flowering ivy.



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It's Winter

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Why not join a society or volunteer?

The Heath & Hampstead Society and the Friends of Kenwood champion the Heath and Kenwood as a place for visitors and for nature. The Marylebone Birdwatching Society runs regular bird walks, and the London Natural History Society runs biodiversity walks and surveys.

Heath Hands helps people of all backgrounds and abilities to get involved in protecting and maintaining Hampstead Heath. Its volunteers help to manage natural habitats and gardens, monitor wildlife and deliver community and learning activities that make the Heath more inclusive for all. Visit the link below for more information.

Redwing from the North

In winter, large gatherings of chattering Redwing thrushes arrive from Scandinavia. You can find them in trees with Fieldfare, another visiting thrush, or in flocks on fields. They feed through the winter on the red berries of Hawthorn, Rowan and Holly.

Foraging flocks

As winter progresses, small birds team up in flocks that move through the bare trees together feeding on buds and insects, or gather at feeding stations. A flock may contain several species foraging together, such as Blue, Great, Coal and Long-tailed Tit, Firecrest, Treecreeper and Nuthatch.

See a Kingfisher in Winter!

Kingfishers breed in Spring and Summer in specially created sand banks on some of the ponds. But you can see them in Winter too, making a flash of bright colour as they fly, or sitting on bare, pondside limbs.

Hibernating on the Heath

Important London populations of Hedgehog and Grass Snake will now be hibernating in protected areas where they live most of the year, away from humans and dogs. Both hibernate in piles of brush and leaves.



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