

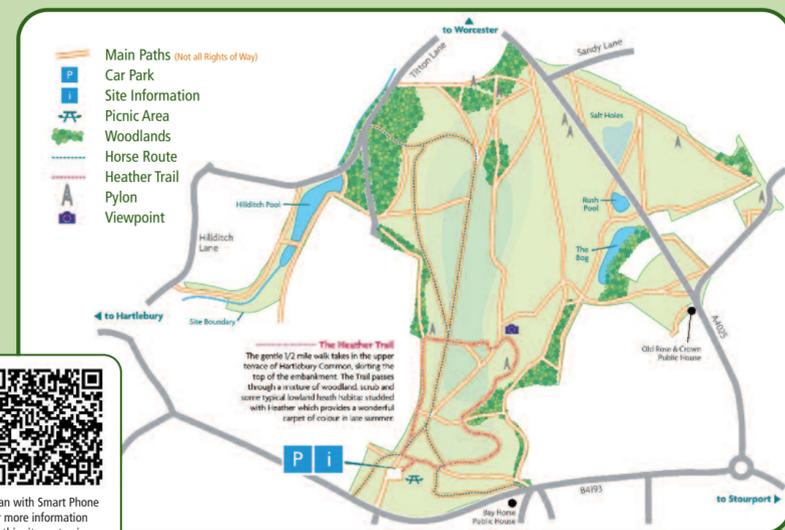
HARTLEBURY COMMON

Hartlebury Common, situated on the edge of Stourport on Severn, is owned and managed by Worcestershire County Council, with Hartlebury Common Local Group offering ongoing conservation support via volunteer work days and practical projects. As a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) it is one of the few remaining examples of Lowland Heath in the county and is one of Worcestershire's most important nature reserves.

The Common's heathland was created by Iron Age farmers who cleared the area of trees, exposing sandy soil. These typical acidic, impoverished, sandy soils which are very low in plant nutrients, plus subsequent animal grazing, prevented the growth of vigorous common plants and allowed the more unusual heathland plants to thrive. This mixture of heather, gorse, broom, grasses, other small plants and scattered trees provides food and shelter to a number of special insects and birds.

The Common also contains several areas of woodland, an ancient pond and Worcestershire's only true bog. Each of these areas is also the home to its own range of wildlife. Because the soil is free-draining, it does not hold water for long and the heath is often subject to summer droughts.

Lowland heathland is a priority for nature conservation because it is a rare and threatened habitat. It has declined greatly in extent during the last two centuries – in England it is estimated that only one sixth of the heathland present in 1800 remains – and it still faces major pressures. The UK has a special obligation to conserve this habitat, given that it supports about 20% of the whole world's lowland heathland.



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HISTORY AND MANAGEMENT

In the past, practices such as cutting trees for firewood and grazing domestic animals kept tree growth under control and maintained the open landscape. With the loss of these traditional activities in modern life, many heathlands are now reverting to woodland. If tree seedlings, plus broom and gorse, are not controlled by cutting, grazing or fire, they will continue to grow until they shade out the underlying heath vegetation. Whilst woodland has value in itself as a habitat, it is much more common than heathland, and so management of existing heathlands to prevent succession is a priority.

This is the reason why cattle have been introduced onto the common, and why the County Council undertook a major programme of tree clearance. The objective is to maintain the SSSI in a favourable condition by reducing the amount of scrub and removing self-seeded trees. Future challenges include control of the spread of bracken, tree and scrub regrowth, and retaining water in The Bog.

HARTLEBURY COMMON LOCAL GROUP

Hartlebury Common Local Group was founded in 2006 and holds monthly meetings on natural history topics relevant to the common.

Our aims are:

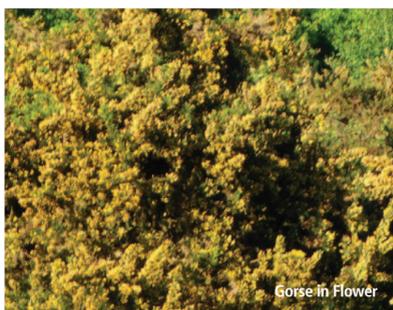
- To promote the conservation of Hartlebury Common, respecting its status as the largest heathland in Worcestershire, but also recognising its habitat diversity.
- To raise awareness of the natural history of the Common through evening talks and field visits
- To work in partnership with Worcestershire County Council Countryside Service and liaise with Natural England
- To undertake practical conservation projects
- To promote the importance of the Common to all local people by providing volunteering opportunities, working with schools, organising intergenerational activities and offering

opportunities to older people and those with disabilities.

For more information see our website <http://www.hartleburycommon.org.uk/>, our Facebook page or email HartleburyCommonLocalGroup@hotmail.co.uk.

PLANTS AND FLOWERS

The impoverished, dry sandy or wet peaty soils of the Common support an extensive range of wild flowers and plants that in turn provide food and shelter for many species of amazing animals. Don't be disheartened if you don't spot everything on your first visit as it's the perfect opportunity to return time after time. After all, how could you resist the sight of drifts of purple Common Heather or the burst of golden Gorse flowers or the russet hues of dying bracken in the Autumn.



Gorse in Flower

Birch with its light, airy foliage and peeling bark is widespread whilst Hillditch Coppice, on the eastern side of the Common is bordered by Beech, Small-leaved Lime and Alder trees. Spot wildflowers with evocative names such as Lady's Bedstraw, Devil's-bit Scabious and Harebell across the Common. Then look closer for tiny green mosses and lichens that can be found bearing names such as Juniper Haircap and Devil's Matchstick. Grasses may seem uninteresting by comparison but look again at the delicate, shaking flower heads of Wavy Hair-grass growing in well drained ground in open sunny spots. Sedges and rushes, on the other hand, prefer more shaded and wetter areas in which to grow. Step into this incredible place, relax and enjoy its beauty and splendour.

MUSHROOMS AND TOADSTOOLS

Fungi found on the Common come in all shapes, colours and sizes. Some are parasites taking nutrients from living timber or other materials, others form mutually beneficial relationships with particular species of trees or plants, exchanging nutrients with them. There are also fungi that derive their nutrients from decomposing plant or animal tissues.

One of the easiest to spot is the Fly Agaric with its bright scarlet cap covered with distinctive white pyramidal warts and white gills. It is common and can be seen from late summer through to early winter. It frequently grows under birch but it is poisonous so should not be picked or eaten. Turkeytail is a fan-shaped bracket fungus with colourful concentric rings on the upper surface. It can be seen all year round. Velvet Shank has an attractive orange-brown cap with white gills that turn pale yellow with age. It grows in groups and on upright trees it can form huge tiers. Cultures of this fungi were flown on the Space Shuttle Columbia in 1993 to research how they would react to low gravity. Common Puffball, also known as the Devil's Snuff-box, grows in groups on the ground in leaf litter. It is usually pear shaped and covered in pyramidal warts or 'pearls' of different sizes. The fungus appears during late summer and autumn. Blackening Waxcap is found in grassland and is one of several species whose long-lasting caps turn black as they mature. They appear in late summer and autumn.

BIRDS

Over 110 species of bird have been recorded at Hartlebury Common and the adjoining Hillditch Pool and Coppice. The diverse mix of habitats make it an important local site for birdlife, in particular some of our declining arable birds such as Yellowhammer and Linnet. Both species breed in good numbers on the reserve. In summertime, the Common hosts large numbers of warblers that visit to breed, with Blackcaps, Chiffchaffs, Common Whitethroats, Garden Warblers, Lesser Whitethroats and Willow Warblers all present. Another summer visitor is Spotted Flycatcher which breeds near the oak woodland at the southeast corner of the site and, one of our most recognisable summer visitors, the Cuckoo is heard on the common annually.

Shorter areas of grass are favoured feeding areas of two of the Common's more colourful resident species, the Green Woodpecker and the Jay. The Kestrel can often be seen hovering over the heathland as it looks for prey. A visit to nearby Hillditch Pool will occasionally give views of a Kingfisher as it passes through, following the course of Tilton Brook.

MAMMALS

Hartlebury Common is home to a wide variety of mammals, many of which are seldom seen due to their nocturnal behaviour. These include larger mammals such as Badger, Fox, and Muntjac Deer. Smaller mammals like Hedgehog, Common Shrew, Pygmy Shrew, Bank Vole, Field Vole and Wood Mouse are also found. The only wild mammals likely to be seen in the daytime are Grey Squirrel and Rabbit. Grazing by the latter has played an important role in keeping the site's vegetation in check and maintaining the heathland habitat. At dusk, Pipistrelle bats can often be seen hawking for insects over the Common and the adjoining Hillditch Pool. Domestic mammals have also helped shape and maintain the special habitats of Hartlebury Common. Horses and ponies belonging to local travellers have for many years been allowed to graze the site and they are still allowed to graze the Lower Heath. This helps keep the grass short and promotes the rich diversity of flora found there. Recent years have seen the introduction of Longhorn Cattle which perform a similar role grazing the upper and lower terraces.

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

Three native species of reptile and five native species of amphibian have been recorded. The reptile most likely to be seen is the Common Lizard which can be found basking in south facing aspects during spring through to autumn. They are very wary, easily disturbed and often heard frantically scurrying off through the undergrowth. Grass Snakes may be encountered basking near the edges of the reserve's pools and the snake-like Slow Worm, which is actually a legless lizard, can also be found. All 3 British newts: Smooth Newt, Palmate Newt and Great Crested Newt have been recorded. Common Frogs breed at The Bog and Rush Pool whilst Common Toads breed in Hillditch Pool.

BEEES AND WASPS

Hartlebury Common is nationally important for bees and wasps and the sandy ground is an important nesting substrate for many different species. The best time to look for them is in the middle part of a hot summer's day when the sun is shining. They visit flowers from which they sip nectar or collect food to provision their nests.

Bees and wasps are the only insects, apart from ants, that make nests which they provision with food for their young. Bees use pollen sometimes mixed with nectar, and wasps collect invertebrates. Most wasps specialise in collecting specific types of invertebrate prey such as spiders, weevils and aphids, while many bees only collect pollen from a small range of plants or rarely just one plant species. Cuckoo bees and wasps which also occur do not make their own nests and their young are raised in the nests of other species. All female bees and wasps have stings that are used in defence and wasps also use their stings to paralyse their prey.



Common Heather

A few bees and wasps are social insects, such as the Honey Bee, Bumble Bee and the Common Wasp, but the majority found are solitary nesters, although there may be aggregations of nests in the same locality.

Some of the bees and wasps to watch out for on Hartlebury Common are: Pantaloon Bee, Early Colletes, Heather Colletes, Red-thighed Epeolus, Bee Wolf, Red-Banded Sand Wasp, Sand Tailed Digger Wasp, Ivy Bee and Brown-banded Carder Bee.

BUTTERFLIES

25 species of butterfly have been recorded but the most important are the heathland specialists. Of the characteristic heathland butterflies, Green Hairstreak, Small Heath and Small Copper, which are far from widespread in the county, can be found on the common in good numbers, although they are not always easy to spot. June and July are the best months to see large numbers of butterflies on the wing, when Meadow Brown, Ringlet and Gatekeeper are found. Also look out for Speckled Wood from April through to September, and Marbled White in June and July.

MOTHS

Over 800 species of moth have been recorded on the common, including many that are usually found only on coastal sandy areas or are heathland specialists such as Fox moth, Archer's Dart, Dotted Border Wave, Beautiful Yellow Underwing, Beautiful Brocade and Annulet. Many of the moths can only be seen at night, and recorded by moth trapping, but there are a number of day flying moths. The most striking of these is the Emperor Moth, a spectacular moth of heathland and moors, which can be seen in April and May. Day flying moths to look out for include: Common Heath, Mother Shipton, Brown Silverline, Silver Y, Beautiful Yellow Underwing, Six-spot Burnet, Narrow bordered Five-spot Burnet and Cinnabar.

GRASSHOPPERS AND CRICKETS

Hartlebury Common has four different species of grasshoppers; Common Green, Field, Meadow and Mottled. These vegetarian insects produce their song by rubbing their long hind legs against their wings to produce the familiar rattling sound. Most grasshoppers can be found in a variety of grasslands but the Mottled Grasshopper is a true heathland specialist, requiring the hot, humid conditions associated with this habitat. They are small and well camouflaged but the male has quite distinctive butterfly-like clubs on the end of his antennae. There are also two species of groundhoppers, Common and Slender. These are also vegetarians, feeding on mosses especially around old fire-sites but they do not sing. Add to that four species of

bush-cricket (Oak, Speckled, Roesel's and Dark Bush Cricket) and there is enough variety to keep the inquisitive mind happy trying to see the differences. Bush-cricket are omnivorous, feeding on vegetation and small invertebrates. Speckled Bush Cricket is the one most often encountered and is bright green with tiny black spots.



Blochy nosed Beetle

the Common's speciality species is the Minotaur Beetle which has 3 horns (two long and one short) on its thorax. The third notable species to look out for is the Bloody-nosed Beetle, a large black long-legged beetle that when threatened exudes a bright red fluid from its mouth to deter predators.

DRAGONFLIES AND DAMSELFLIES

Hartlebury Common has a combination of habitat, from the stream and pool at Hillditch to the wet heathland on the lower levels of the common that can attract a wide range of species.

Hillditch (see map) combines an alder lined stream attracting the two demoiselles – the Beautiful Demoiselle and Banded Demoiselle, as well a good list of damselflies and dragonflies such as the Red-eyed Damselfly, Southern Hawker, Emperor and the unusual Scarce Chaser. The latter species is an interesting anomaly as Hartlebury is the only location other than the River Avon, where it has settled since it arrived in Worcestershire in 2004

The presence of water at the Rush Pool and The Bog provides water in a heathland context providing habitat associated with slightly more unusual dragonflies. Here, the conditions and rushy plants can attract the Common Hawker which is far from common, Four Spotted Chaser, Emerald Damselfly and even the Black Darter. 23 of the 29 species currently recorded in Worcestershire have been seen on Hartlebury Common and so is a very important site.

BEETLES

Hartlebury Common is home to many beetles, including specialists of heathland. The iridescent Green Tiger Beetle is an aggressive hunter and can often be encountered running along the sandy paths during the spring and summer as it looks for its prey. Another of

How to find HARTLEBURY COMMON

Hartlebury Common, DY13 9JB is located just off the B4193 Stourport to Hartlebury Road. Follow the brown and white tourist signs to Wilden Top Car Park. Grid Reference: SO826713. There are parking areas for disabled visitors. Although some of the site cannot be accessed by wheelchairs, mobility scooters or pushchairs due to deep sand, uneven surfaces and steep slopes, there is a picnic area (with wheelchair accessible tables) at Wilden Top car park with flat grass suitable for wheelchairs and pushchairs.

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