

Explore and connect to nature in this exceptional landscape

Visit the website



PURBECK HEATHS

National Nature Reserve

WHAT WE DO

Restore, protect & enhance

Over the last 50 years, we have been restoring heathland across Purbeck, removing forestry plantations, undoing the damage of agricultural intensification and re-wetting drained bogs. Over that time, the efforts of different landowners have reconnected individual heathland areas into what is now the second largest block of heathland in the UK.

We are working together to create the conditions that will allow nature to not just survive but thrive in this landscape. We are taking down some fences between different landowners to create 1,280 hectares of single grazing unit (see map overleaf) to restore a wilder grazing system where cattle, ponies and pigs will wander freely, creating the bare ground habitats that many heathland species depend upon.

We aim to reintroduce lost species into the landscape. Beavers have become known as "ecosystem engineers" for the impact they have on the landscape, recreating rare and currently extinct habitats. We are also working together to ensure the Purbeck Heaths remain an outstanding place for people of all ages to discover wildlife and connect with nature.

Photo © Terry Bagley

Southern Damselfly

HISTORY OF THE LANDSCAPE

The heaths were created a few thousand years ago as our ancestors cleared land of trees for early agriculture. Naturally found nutrients from these soils were used up with year upon year of farming, eventually leaving swathes of nutrient-poor scrubland where rare and fragile plants and wildlife have since colonised to form heathland.

Local archaeological evidence show settlements of Iron Age round houses, Roman potteries and salt works from which salt was exported across the Roman Empire from Poole Harbour. Clay extraction still continues today using the road network to transport it onwards, however the old trackway networks along with the scars from World War II can be traced across the landscape we see today.

Slepe Heath
Photo © Jon Bish

EXPLORE THE HEATHS

The Purbeck Heaths National Nature Reserve (NNR) was declared in 2020 and is internationally important for nature. The land is owned and managed by several different organisations who are working together to enhance this special place for you to enjoy and wildlife to flourish.

It brings together three pre-existing, much smaller areas of NNR along with the surrounding landscape to make a bigger, better and more joined up area for the animals, plants and their habitats to thrive. This is crucial to the recovery of nature under the climate and ecological emergency.

For more information, please ask at one of the visitor hubs and explore our website www.purbeckheaths.org.uk

Dartford Warbler

Photo © Ben Hall
RSPB-images.com



Purbeck Mineral and Mining Museum

The Purbeck Mineral and Mining Museum at Purbeck Park, Norden explore these fascinating stories further. This museum is run purely by local volunteers so check their website for opening times: www.purbeckminingmuseum.org

NNR Partners



WHAT LIVES HERE

A flavour of the incredibly rare things



Purbeck Mason Wasp

A striking solitary wasp only known from south-east Dorset in the UK. The adults are dependent on Bell Heather for nectar, and caterpillars of the Heath Button Moth as food for its young.



Photo © Terry Bagley

Yellow centaury

A tiny plant with four-petalled yellow flowers. It is restricted to heathlands in the south and west of the UK, particularly where cattle or pony grazing creates the bare ground its seeds require to germinate.



Photo © Alex Hyde, Back from the Brink

WHAT LIVES HERE

The things to look out for

Dartford Warbler

I love to perch on top of gorse bushes to keep a lookout. In Dorset, only a few of us survived the severe winter of 1963, but with all the heathland restoration, we are now thriving again.

Nightjar

I migrate from Africa and spend my summer evenings making churring sounds to attract other nightjars – an experience not to be missed! I make my nest and lay my eggs on the ground. I am a nocturnal bird, watch out for my silhouette at dusk, I fly more like a bat than a bird.



Silver studded blue butterfly

I love living in the heaths where our special friends, the black meadow ants, also live. We lay our eggs near their nests, where they take care of them. When our eggs develop into larvae, they secrete sugar for the ants to say thanks!

Southern Damselfly

I am a very rare damselfly and because I'm not a strong flier, I can only live in certain isolated areas in southern England. By joining up the heath areas, I can move between the mires I love and meet other damselflies.



Photo © National Trust
Images/Matthew Oates

LOVE THE HEATHS

Parts of the Purbeck Heaths are fragile

Some species of bird migrate from Africa and choose the Purbeck Heaths to breed between February - August. They build their nests exclusively on the ground and are at particular risk of disturbance from dogs not on leads.

Other species of birds arrive from the Arctic in August to spend their winter in our milder climate, feeding on the mudflats and shoreline of Poole Harbour.

Help protect the nature

- Keep dogs on leads. Visit www.dorsetdogs.org.uk for more information and dog friendly sites to visit.
- Stay on the footpaths and take note of the signage. It's not just about the birds – this is a complex landscape where some endangered species need bare ground and others need protection from trampling and disturbance.
- The types of plants that survive the harsh landscape of heathlands also burn easily. Never have a fire or a BBQ here – it is illegal.
- People visit and enjoy the Purbeck Heaths for different reasons. Please be considerate and tolerant of others.
- Plan to take your litter home with you after your visit as you may not find a bin whilst you are here.

CONNECT WITH NATURE

The Purbeck Heaths are a wonderful place to connect with nature. Whether exploring on foot, by bike, kayak or horse you could experience wildlife spectacles, amazing sunsets or just find some space to breathe. If you are visiting for the first time, RSPB Arne is recommended.

Whatever you choose to do, and whoever comes with you, please do so respectfully – the heaths are fragile.

Nightjar

Photo © Andy Hay
RSPB-images.com



The Purbeck Heaths Grazing Unit is being created through a dedicated partnership, with support from the Green Recovery Challenge Fund and the Wytch Farm Landscape and Access Enhancement Fund (WFLF). The Green Recovery Challenge Fund is funded by Defra and is being delivered by The National Lottery Heritage Fund in partnership with Natural England and the Environment Agency.

Inspire a connection to nature and place

EXPLORE PURBECK HEATHS

National Nature Reserve

ENJOY RESPONSIBLY

Please do not light a fire or BBQ on the heaths, they catch fire easily. Some campsites may allow BBQs or firepits in allocated areas, check directly with your campsite.

MAP KEY

- Urban Area
- Single Grazing Unit
- NNR Area
- Campsite
- View Point
- Picnic Area
- Café
- CyclExperience Bike Hire
- Purbeck Mineral & Mining Museum
- Walking Routes
- Nature Watching
- Gift Shop
- Beach
- Play Area
- Entrance Fee
- Toilets
- Breezer 30 seasonal bus route
- Breezer 40 bus route
- Breezer 50 bus route
- South West Coast Path
- The Purbeck Way Walk
- On-road route
- Off-road route
- Poole Harbour Trail #1
- Poole Harbour Trail #2
- Poole Harbour Trail #3

While all reasonable care has been taken to ensure the information contained on this map is up to date and accurate, no warranty is given that the information contained on this map is free from error or omission. Any reliance placed on such information shall be at the sole risk of the user. Please verify the accuracy of the information prior to using it.

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VISITOR HUB
 RSPB Arne, Arne Road,
 Arne, Wareham BH20 5BJ

VISITOR HUB
 Seasonal Opening
 Spring - Autumn
 National Trust, Brownsea Island,
 Poole Harbour, BH13 7EE

VISITOR HUB
 Knoll Beach Centre, Ferry Road,
 Swanage, BH19 3AQ

VISITOR HUB
FOR CYCLISTS & WALKERS
 Campsite Shop & Seasonal Café
 Burnbake Forest Lodges & Campsite
 Corfe Castle, Wareham, BH20 5JH

VISITOR HUB
 Blue Pool, Furzebrook Road
 Wareham, Dorset, BH20 5AR

VISITOR HUB
 Norden, Corfe Castle, BH20 5DW

PURBECK PARK
 CyclExperience
 Bike Hire
 Purbeck Mineral
 & Mining Museum

