

# Welcome to Canford Heath

This heath is one of the largest remaining heaths in Dorset, lying between Broadstone to the west and Knighton Heath Golf Course in the east. Since the 1940's the area of heathland has been much reduced but it still covers over 850 acres (380 hectares – equivalent to 532 Wembley sized football pitches!).

You can easily spend two hours walking around the site, although there are many shorter routes of around ½ hour to be enjoyed as well. With its valleys and hills accentuating a feeling of wilderness, it is possible to lose sight of the surrounding development. However the views across to Corfe Castle and the Purbecks should not be missed.



Photo by Karen Pearce

# Enjoying Canford Heath

Since the 1980's the wildlife value has been recognised and at the same time it was becoming a very important area for informal recreation. Many local people and visitors come to walk, exercise dogs, ride bicycles or horses and enjoy the wildlife.

The many paths and tracks make it easy to enjoy all parts of Canford Heath without ever having to leave them. To help look after the heath when you visit please follow the Heathland Code on the back cover. Most of Canford Heath has also been designated as open access land.

The rough nature of heathland paths can be challenging, with steep gradients in places, however routes and access points that are more suitable for some mobility chairs are highlighted on the map (RADAR locks are used on these gates). Please be aware path conditions can change, particularly with heavy rain, and there may be times when sections are more difficult to negotiate.

Guided walks are held on the Heath and details can be obtained from Leisure Services.



Photo and cover photo by Michaelham Photography

# History of Canford Heath

Bronze Age settlers started to clear the Birch and Oak woodland that once covered South East Dorset around 3,500 years ago to create fields and pastures. Bronze Age burial mounds can still be seen on Canford Heath.



Children gathering furze (gorse).

© Dorset Natural History & Archaeological Society

The land was important to local inhabitants for centuries, whether providing bedding, fodder or thatching materials, livestock grazing, turf for fuel or a source for gravel, sand or clay.

Old boundary banks are still visible, the majority of which are from the 19th century Enclosures Act. Most enclosures were subsequently planted up as pine plantations and the Scots and Maritime Pine trees still influence the landscape. Some tracks have been in use since at least Saxon times. South Walk was an important route between Christchurch and Wimborne in the 1700s, while Lady Wimborne established Longfleet Drive as an ornamental drive from Canford Manor House (Canford School) to Poole in the late 19th century.

# Recent Times and Now

In the past the heath in this area has had many different owners, including the Wimborne family. Now the Borough of Poole owns most of Canford Heath Nature Reserve, with the Beale family owning an area by Gravel Hill Road and three other independent landowners owning the remainder.

During the Second World War the British and American armies used Canford Heath for military exercises. Parts of the heath are riddled with slit trenches and 'foxholes', while fragments of shells have been found.

Between 1962 and 1986 most of South Canford Heath was lost to housing and industry. A road route across the west end of the heath was started although never completed and the cut remains (Route E).



Route E - reclaimed by the heath.

Photo by Karen Pearce

Sand and gravel has been excavated at many locations, the largest workings were undertaken by W.H.White Plc on the northern edge of the site. The hole was then used for landfill, taking household waste from Poole and Bournemouth. Once capped it will be restored to an acid grass/heath habitat. Methane will continue to be collected from the landfill and used to generate electricity.



The recovery of the heath after arson.

# Wildlife of Canford Heath

The heaths of Dorset should be largely open areas of heather and gorse, with few trees. Canford Heath is dominated by the purple flowering Common Heather (Ling) with the brighter flowered Bell Heather and fine Bristle Bent Grass blended in amongst it. In July the yellow flowers of Western Gorse appear giving an attractive contrast of colours.

In June or July the waving cotton-wool tufts of the Cotton Grass and the paler flowered, greyish Cross-Leaved Heath highlight the areas of wet heath and bog. Here the yellow flower spikes of the Bog Asphodel and the tiny Sundews, that trap small insects on their sticky red leaves, can also be found.

The diversity of the habitat and the summer warmth favour a variety of wildlife adapted to the heath, from insects to reptiles and birds.

The rare Smooth Snake and Sand Lizard live on the heath, the first favouring deep heather whilst the second may be seen sunning itself on the edges of sandy tracks.



Sand Lizard (male).

Photo by Karen Pearce

Adders are also present but are wary creatures, and given the chance, normally move away from people and dogs as they feel them approach.

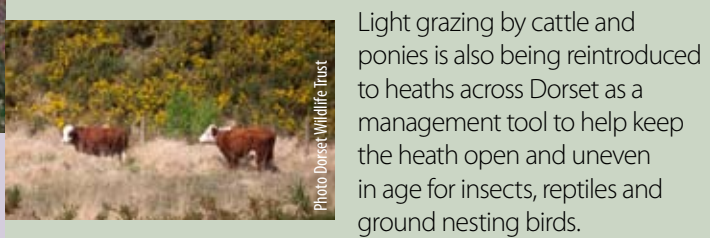
The Dartford Warbler is a rare bird of southern heathland, but can quite easily be seen flitting across the tops of the heather all year. While two birds that can only be encountered in the summer are the Hobby, a bird of prey that may be seen swooping down for dragonflies, and the Nightjar which can be heard giving its strange metallic churr at dusk.

# Looking After the Heath Habitat and its Wildlife

Heathland is ultimately a human made habitat, which without positive action will revert to woodland and the special wildlife that it supports would disappear.

Today work is undertaken to ensure the rare wildlife thrives and it remains as open heath for people to enjoy. Pine and Birch are cleared every winter, although some are kept as they have a role to play in small numbers. Stands of mature Pine are also important features in the landscape and will be retained in suitable locations.

Rhododendron is not native but since its introduction it has spread strongly. It has little benefit to native wildlife and it is important to restore most areas back to heath.



Light grazing by cattle and ponies is also being reintroduced to heaths across Dorset as a management tool to help keep the heath open and uneven in age for insects, reptiles and ground nesting birds.

Photo Dorset Wildlife Trust

Each winter work is done to cut back vegetation along paths and fire defendable lines. This work is essential in reducing the amount of damage caused by a fire and also ensures good fire vehicle access.



Photo by Karen Pearce



Photo by Karen Pearce

# Getting Involved - The Heathland Volunteer Network

**The role of a volunteer:** There can never be too many eyes and ears on such a large heath reporting misuse or wildlife sightings. Anyone with an interest in the heath and its protection can be a volunteer. You can help either by just knowing who to call when something happens or by acting directly when out on site. Newsletters and the Event/task list are sent out twice a year to those on the Volunteer Network.

The Volunteer Network has recently evolved from the independent volunteer group Canford Heath Heathwatch, which began in 1989. In the 1980's, before the heath was being managed, its misuse led to the habitat being damaged and local people wanted to take action to stop it, leading to the formation of Heathwatch.

**Practical Winter Tasks:** There is also the opportunity to help keep the heath in shape and get fit by joining us on our winter tasks which run from October through to February! Everyone is welcome for however long can be spared, with tools and gloves provided by the Leisure Team. For more details call Leisure Services.



Photo by Karen Pearce

The Police's local Safer Neighbourhood Team and heath volunteers.



Photo by Karen Pearce

# Damaging Heathland - Help Stop It!

Education, fencing, patrolling and enforcement have helped reduce misuse. However humans can still have a negative effect on the heath through fires, motorbikes, dog fouling, uncontrolled dogs, garden waste and rubbish dumping. Such activities range from unpleasant to very dangerous for legitimate site users and damage the heath, for this reason they are not permitted on Canford Heath.

**Fires:** Rapid reporting, with details of the nearest fire access point to the Fire Service on 999 is essential in reducing the damage done. Never try to tackle them by yourself.

**Motorbikes:** It is illegal for motorbikes to be ridden on the nature reserve. Please report any to Dorset Police on 01202 222 222. Whilst they may not attend at that time, the incident should be logged and the matter followed up.

**Dogs:** When under close control dogs are welcome. By law they must be on short leads during the main bird breeding period, 1st March to the 31st July, to protect birds such as the Nightjar and Dartford Warbler. They should also be on a lead when livestock are present.

Please pick up after your dog to ensure the site is a pleasant place for all to visit and the habitat isn't damaged. It is an offence under the Dog Control Order 2006 to not pick up

Due to the rarity of the habitat and its wildlife, Canford Heath was designated under British law as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), then under European law as a Special Protection Area (SPA), Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and part of the western end as a RAMSAR site, providing it with the formal recognition that allows its management and protection for the future. Heathland occurs in other European countries but it is also limited and under threat.

## Leisure Services - Contact Us

The Council's Leisure Services Team look after the heath and work closely with the Police, Fire Service and other bodies, under the Urban Heath Partnership banner.

If you want information about Volunteering or to let us know about something you have seen, please contact us:

**Phone:** 01202 265265  
**Email:** leisure@poole.gov.uk  
**Write:** Leisure Services  
 Borough of Poole, 30-32 Northmead Drive  
 Creekmoor, Poole BH17 7RP

We can supply this information in this leaflet in large print, on audio tape or have it translated for you. A member of staff will be happy to discuss this with you, please call: 01202 265265.

# Canford Heath

Information & map for

Local Nature Reserve

## Heathland Code

- ▶ **Be safe – plan ahead and follow any signs.**  
 Plan your route, using the many paths. Follow advice or instructions on any signs.
- ▶ **Leave gates and property as you find them.**  
 Gates should be shut, unless locked open. No digging of ramps or jumps. No dens, camps or camp fires.
- ▶ **Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home.**  
 Keep to paths to avoid disturbing wildlife. Litter can be dangerous to wildlife, please take it home. The main bird nesting season is the 1st March to the 31st July.
- ▶ **Keep dogs under close control and please pick up after them.**  
 By law you must have your dog under close control and they must be on a short lead during bird breeding 1st March - 31st July or when livestock are present. Please pick up after your dog and place in a bin (it is an offence not to).
- ▶ **Consider other people.**  
 Please use and leave the heath as you would wish to find it. Ride horses and bicycles with care. Excessive noise will disturb wildlife and other site users.
- ▶ **General Enquiries - call Leisure Services 01202 265265.**
- ▶ **FIRE - call 999.**
- ▶ **MOTORBIKES - call Police 01202 222 222 (if you feel threatened call 999).**

NESTING BIRDS



# Wildlife and Map of Canford Heath

