

Redhill Common

Local Nature Reserve

Introduction

Redhill Common is a small relic heathland site that was once part of an extensive heathland which covered most of south east Dorset.

Heathland owes its existence in large part to Neolithic farming activities some 5000 years ago. Tree felling and grazing by these farmers created extensive areas of open heathland, which supports a range of wildlife, some of which cannot survive anywhere else.

Old aerial photographs show Redhill Common to have been dominated by heathland until the 1970's when activities such as regular mowing and tree planting started to degrade the area.



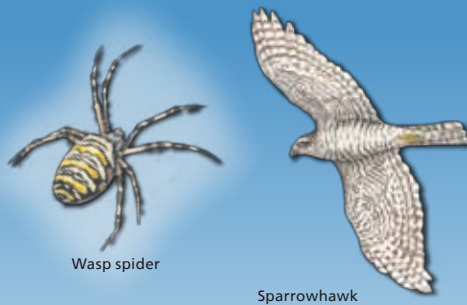
Conservation

Heathland is a very rare habitat and without management it quickly reverts to scrub and woodland dominated by gorse, bramble and birch. To control these invasive species a heathland restoration project began in 2005. The results can now be seen with the re-establishment of heather and acid grassland in several places around the common. The local community and a well-established voluntary group of keen conservationists are actively helping to re-establish some of the 'lost' heathland, with benefits not only for wildlife, but also for residents and visitors

Insects and Spiders

Although dragonflies and damselflies are most often found around water some species can be seen on Redhill feeding on flying insects. Look out for the scarce chaser and the easily recognisable golden-ringed dragonfly.

The four spotted orb weaver spider can change its colour according to its background. It tends to make its web near the ground to catch jumping insects such as grasshoppers. At a glance you might mistake the wasp spider with its black and yellow stripes for its flying namesake. It was first recorded in Britain in 1922 having been introduced from southern Europe.



Wasp spider

Sparrowhawk

Birds

The open grassland provides perfect habitat for the green woodpecker. They spend a lot of time on the ground probing into ants' nests with their bill and using their extremely long, sticky tongue to extract the ants and their larvae. The green woodpecker features prominently in folklore and has many local names, often linked to its laughing call – e.g. laughing Betsey, yockel and yappingdale but the most common is yaffle.

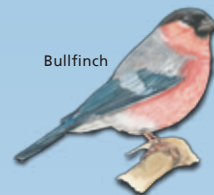
Other common birds to look out for are, sparrow hawk, bullfinch and jay.



Green woodpecker



Jay



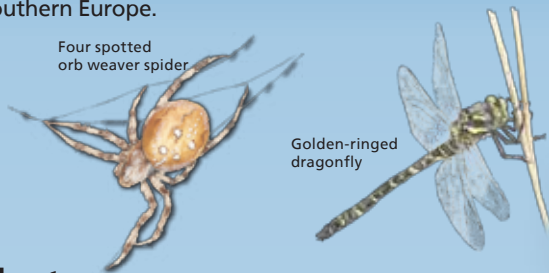
Bullfinch



Peacock

Plants

The acid grassland is dominated by the grasses common bent, bristle bent and sweet vernal grass, but a closer look will reveal other plants such as sheep's sorrel and bird's-foot trefoil.



Four spotted orb weaver spider

Golden-ringed dragonfly



Common heather

Heather is once again becoming a feature of the Common and there are two species found here, common heather and bell heather. Can you spot the difference?

In autumn look out for the brightly coloured fly agaric fungi which are often found under birch trees.



Bell heather

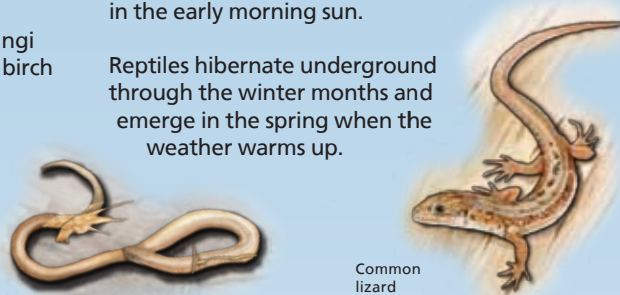


Fly agaric

Reptiles

Two of the six native British reptiles, the slow worm and the common lizard can be found on Redhill Common. Reptiles are shy creatures and can be difficult to spot, they are most likely to be seen basking in the early morning sun.

Reptiles hibernate underground through the winter months and emerge in the spring when the weather warms up.



Slow worm

Common lizard

Butterflies

21 species of butterfly can be found here including the small heath and orange tip. Others you might spot are the holly blue, common blue, peacock and gatekeeper.

The speckled wood can often be seen defending a patch of sunlight against intruders. It performs a spectacular spiralling display flight.

The impressive male emperor moth flies during the daytime in May. The fully grown caterpillar is green, black and warty and is perfectly camouflaged when feeding on heather.



Speckled wood



Gatekeeper



Holly blue



Emperor moth