



Essex Wildlife Trust

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Essex Habitats

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Essex is blessed with a rich and varied wildlife heritage. It is arguably most famous for its long and sometimes barren coastline that many can enjoy: the rivers, some wonderful ancient woodland, mosaic and grassland, important brownfield sites and coastal grazing marshes. However there is more to Essex than this, with heaths, wetlands and important wildlife corridors scattered throughout the county within the wider farmed countryside. These beautiful and often vulnerable wild places are not static and have evolved gradually over thousands of years in response to climate, soil, water and the impact of humans.

A brief description of each of the major habitats found in Essex is given here

Essex Coast

The Essex coast is arguably the longest coast line in England. The coastal wetlands of the Essex coast and the Wash are wonderfully atmospheric, mystical places. They are renowned for extensive areas of grazing marshes, lagoons, shingle, mudflats, saltmarsh, fresh water pools and reedbeds. The North Sea has always influenced, and continues to shape, our coast today.

Typical species: Wintering Geese and Wildfowl, Breeding Waders, Sandwich Tern, Avocet, Common Seal, Water Vole, Shrubby Sea Blight, Sea Lavender

Threatened species: Bittern, Otter, Natterjack Toad, Dark Green Fritillary, Starlet Sea Anemone

Ancient Woodland

Essex's ancient woodlands are now tranquil, tucked-away places, but they were once a hive of activity and vital to the local economy. They provided local people with fuel, timber for construction, hurdles and bark for use in the tanning

industry. The regular harvest of these products created opportunities for a rich biodiversity of plants and animals, but recent neglect has left many of these ancient places impoverished. Re-creation of the ancient coppicing regime is now heralding the return of a wide variety of woodland grasses, flowers, invertebrates and birds to Essex's ancient woodlands.

Typical species: Hornbeam, Small Leaved Lime, Great Tit, Grey Squirrel, Speckled Wood Butterfly, Red Campion

Threatened species: Greater Butterfly Orchid, Nightingale

Brownfield Sites

Brownfield sites are the new lowland heaths and flower-rich meadows and in many areas of Essex, but particularly in the south, support many nationally scarce species, particularly important populations of invertebrates. Brownfield sites are often areas of land near development and sometimes on contaminated soil, they make up sparsely vegetated areas with bare ground,

Typical species: a number of orchid species, scrub, secondary woodland, a number of bees, reptiles, invertebrates.

Grasslands

The heavy clay soils of south- and mid-Essex support Essex's best remaining examples of old pastures, commons and grasslands. These vulnerable, often little known, gems have survived changes in farming and the evolution of the south Essex landscape over the last 200 years, and persist on the fringes or in the middle of villages and river valleys. Many have now become a valued local amenity and in some rare cases continue to be grazed in a traditional way, supporting the mix of pasture and fen that make these places so important in an otherwise intensively farmed landscape.

Typical species: Lesser Stitchwort, Lady's Bedstraw, Sweet Vernal Grass, Knapweed and Hairy Sedge

Threatened species: Green-Winged Orchid, Sulphur Clover.

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