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## Heathland

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Heathland

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Familiar as wide, open landscapes peppered with the yellow of gorse and purple of heathers, more than 80% of our lowland heaths have been destroyed since the 19th century. Even rarer than rainforest, heathland is one of our most threatened habitats.

### Heathlands for people

For thousands of years, heathlands were used by local people for grazing livestock and gathering materials. Gorse was used for fires, bracken for animal bedding, sand and gravel for building, and bilberries and fungi for food. These traditions have slowly been lost to the march of civilisation and our heathlands have been built upon, turned into farmland or planted with non-native conifers.

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## Wildlife among the heathers

Those that are left, however, support a whole host of wildlife. Bees buzz around the bulbous blooms of bell heather and more delicate stems of ling heather. Adders and common lizards bask in the sun on bare patches of ground, while metallic green tiger beetles scuttle across sandy soils. In wetter areas, sphagnum mosses form a spongy, sopping layer and sundews glisten in the sun, waiting to ensnare unsuspecting flies.

The scattered cover provides ideal conditions for breeding birds. Listen out for the distinctive 'churring' of a male nightjar on a balmy summer evening; superbly camouflaged by their grey-brown mottled plumage, they nest on the ground. Much more conspicuous is the Dartford warbler, often spotted perched on a prominent gorse branch singing its heart out.

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## How we're helping

Purple-carpeted heaths are the result of hundreds of years of low-impact human activities such as livestock-grazing and scrub clearance. Across the UK The Wildlife Trusts are working to restore this balance and protect our heaths by clearing encroaching scrub, reinstating grazing regimes and reseeding heathers. We are also campaigning for protection from development and encouraging local people not to disturb ground-nesting birds. This work is vital if our rare heathland wildlife is to survive.

The Wildlife Trusts manage many heathland habitats for the benefit of wildlife; by volunteering for your local Trust you can help too, and you'll make new friends and learn new skills along the way.

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## Typical heathland wildlife

Nightjar, woodlark, Dartford warbler, stonechat, adder, grass snake, common lizard, slow worm, sand lizard, ling heather, bell heather, cross-leaved heath, gorse, round-leaved sundew, bilberry, heath spotted-orchid, sphagnum moss, silver-studded blue butterfly, green tiger beetle, small red damselfly, keeled skimmer, golden-ringed dragonfly

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## Other Heathland habitats

**Lowland Heathland**  
Shewood Forest Heathland - John Smith



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