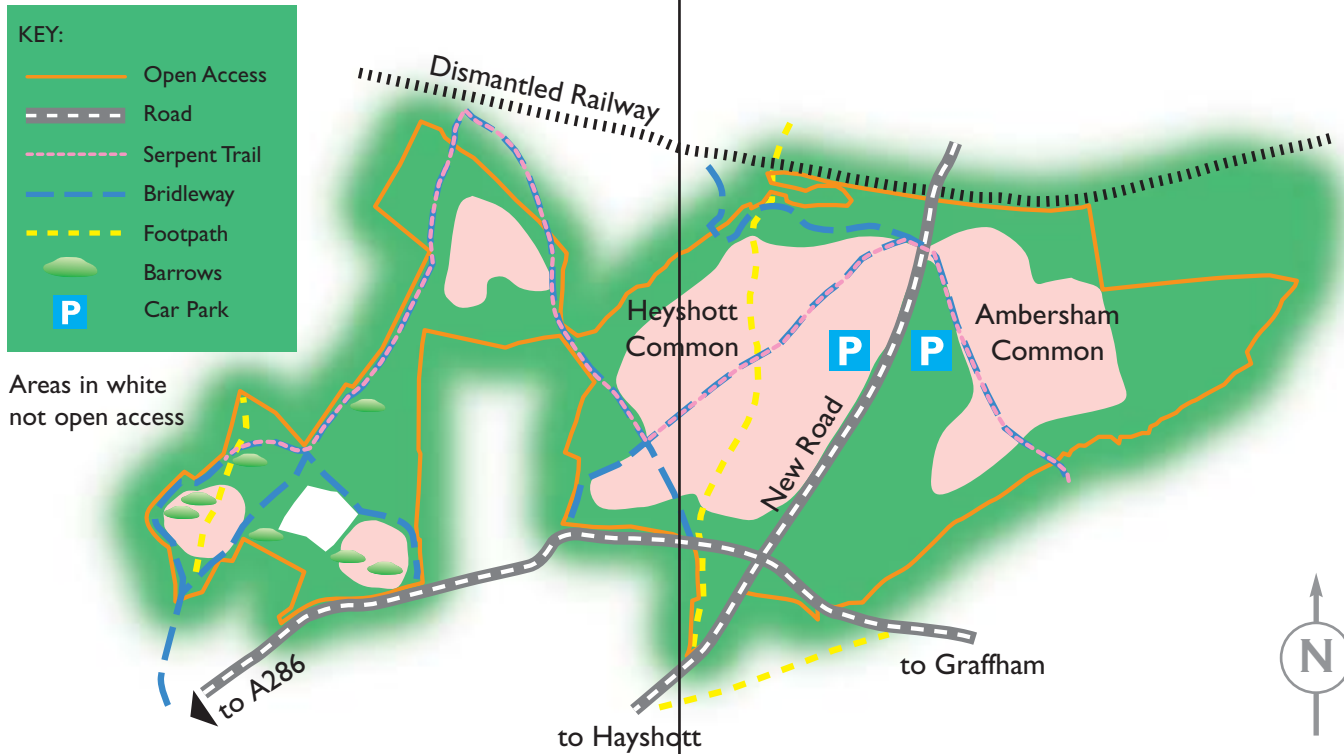


AMBERSHAM

& Heyshott Commons



Areas in white
not open access

If you would like to join the volunteer rangers in carrying out conservation tasks on heathland sites, please contact us at the address below. All are welcome.

South Downs Joint Committee
Northern Area Office
Midhurst Depot
Bepton Road
Midhurst
West Sussex GU29 9QX

Telephone: 01730 812134 or 01730 817945
e-mail: northern@southdowns-aonb.gov.uk
www.visitsouthdowns.com

The Cowdray Estate Office
Cowdray Park
Easebourne
Midhurst
West Sussex
GU29 0AQ
Telephone: 01730 812 423
www.cowdray.co.uk

The Countryside Code

- Be safe – plan ahead and follow any signs
- Leave gates and property as you find them
- Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home
- Keep dogs under close control
- Consider other people

For information on new access rights
www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk

Between 1st March and 31st July you must keep your dog on a short lead to help protect ground nesting heathland birds and their young.



Produced by the Sussex Wealden Greensand Heaths Project with permission from the Cowdray Estate 2006



Ambersham and Heyshott Commons

Ambersham and Heyshott Commons are owned and managed by the Cowdray Estate. They are amongst the finest remaining heathlands in West Sussex and were made a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in 1954. In summer the large areas of heath are alive with purple heather, buzzing insects and calling birds. Many uncommon plants can be found growing in patches of marshy grassland and bog. Also look out for glow worms on a summer's evening.



Heathland is an ancient habitat that was created thousands of years ago when man cleared the original wild wood to graze livestock and grow crops. The exposed sandy soils quickly lost their nutrients, creating ideal conditions for the heathers and other heathland plants. The Bronze Age Barrows on Heyshott Common are scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAMS) and are some three and a half millennia old. The effort taken to construct them using simple wood, flint and antler tools would have been considerable, and it is likely that they were both territorial markers and places of ritual enactment.

Bog Pimpernel

A delicate plant that you can find on Heyshott Common. It forms a low growing mat on heathland sites in damp or boggy areas. Heyshott Common is one of the few places in West Sussex where the bog pimpernel grows - truly an illusive pimpernel!



Photo © Bruce Middleton

The elegant flowers that appear between June and August only open when the sun is out.

Photo © Derek Middleton



Sand Lizard

Early in the morning in summer you may catch sight of one of our rarest reptiles, the sand lizard. It will most likely be found basking in the sun beside a path across the heathland.

True to their name, sand lizards seek out patches of bare sand in

sunny spots on the common. They lay their eggs in the sand and these are then incubated by the sun's warmth.

Although shy and hard to find, the male turns a vivid emerald green on his sides and belly during courtship. However, if his attentions are unwelcome, the female will raise each of her front feet alternately and shake them to dampen his ardour!



Photo © Mike Edwards

Robber Fly

The heathland of Ambersham Common is home to many rare invertebrates, including the endangered robber fly, asilus crabroniformis.

The adult has a poisonous saliva that will kill other insects (including bumble bees) within 2 seconds. A strict carnivore, the robber fly will then suck the juices from its prey!

Photo © Derek Middleton



Dartford Warbler

Unlike other warblers, the Dartford does not migrate.

Instead it endures the cold of our winters and the risk of starvation.

It is the classic heathland bird and its survival is very closely linked to that of our lowland heaths.

Victorian naturalist, W. H. Hudson, described it as the 'small furze lover'. This is because many spiders and insects on which the Dartford feeds live in furze (or gorse as we now know it).

Nightjar

Nightjars are one of our rarest heathland birds.

They are summer migrants who visit our heaths to nest on the sandy ground out on the heath in the shade of the gorse or young tree.

You can hear the distinctive 'churring' call of the male at dusk as they hunt for insects across the common.



Photo © Derek Middleton