

CHAPEL COMMON

Lowland Heathland



Chapel Common has been managed by the South Downs Joint Committee's Heaths Project since 1996 under an agreement with the landowner. It is located 2.5 miles south of Liphook off the B2070. The Common is Open Access Land which you are welcome to explore on foot. Please ensure that gates are shut behind you and dogs are kept under close control.

The South Downs Joint Committee would like to thank the many volunteers who have given their time over the years to help restore and care for this precious site. If you would like to join the volunteer rangers in carrying out conservation tasks on Chapel Common, please contact us at the address below. All are welcome.

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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 2006



Chapel Common

Chapel Common is an important remnant of an extensive heathland landscape that Gilbert White wrote about in his 'Natural History of Selbourne'. The site is now managed to restore the lowland heath to its former glory.



Southern Marsh Orchid

The habitat is a mixture of small areas of pine and birch scrub interspersed with larger more open heathland and grassland areas. Much of what is now grassland was farmed in the past and nutrients added to the soil. Although this has altered the heathland, it has also resulted in a diverse environment for plants such as orchids.

Heathland is an ancient habitat that was created many thousands of years ago by the activities of man. The original wild wood was cleared in the Bronze Age. Nutrients leached out of the exposed sandy soils, creating ideal conditions for the heathers and other heathland plants to grow.

Heathland Grazing

If you are lucky, you will see the small herd of Shetland Cattle that are grazed under Commoner's rights. The rights of the Commoners to graze their stock and take wood from the Common were a vital part of the traditional management of lowland heathland. Today, these distinctive black and white animals are part of a grazing project to help maintain the heathland habitat with their munching. Their grazing will also create 'micro' habitats suitable for rare terrestrial invertebrates.

The Shetland cattle have proved themselves to be ideally suited to grazing lowland heathland sites. This is because they were bred for hardiness and ability to fatten on poor grazing in their native Scottish islands.



Cattle helping volunteers to clear scrub (and get closer to the fire!) shortly after their release in 2006



An area of heathland regeneration when the heather is in flower (Summer, 2005).

Invertebrates

Chapel Common is protected under law as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) because of the number of different invertebrates found on the site. Heathland supports a number of specialist species that would not be able to survive in other habitats.

As you walk out onto the heathland on a summer's day, you may notice it is much warmer than the surrounding woodland. Invertebrates prefer hot open conditions and the sandy soils of the Greensand heat quickly and provide much appreciated additional warmth.



Photo © Mike Edwards

Mining Bee

Many invertebrates depend on heathland plants. Mining bees, like the female pictured here on ling heather collect pollen for their larvae exclusively from heather. She also needs dry sandy banks in which to dig a nest.

Digger Wasp

The female wasp collects and paralyzes small weevils that live on gorse bushes. She has a specially designed snout so that she can carry them back to her nest. Although the adult wasps feed on nectar (shown here on cross-leaved heath) the larvae prefer living prey!



Photo © Mike Edwards



Photo © Derek Middleton

Woodlark

Despite its name, the woodlark is a bird of open country, principally heathland in the UK. It is an endangered species and of international importance. Woodlark and the similar skylark are both found on Chapel Common. The woodlark can be distinguished by a buff-coloured eye stripe and white wing marks in flight. The song is highly distinctive, consisting of several phrases interspersed with a giveaway 'loo-loo-loo' that has also been described as a "fluty whistle"! Both birds nest on the ground and are vulnerable to disturbance.

Minotaur Beetle

Walking around the Common you can find small holes (about 1cm in diameter) in the ground. These are often the entrance holes to the burrows of the minotaur beetle. The female beetle digs a shaft in the sand (up to 60 cm!) to make several brood chambers for the young beetle grubs.

The male beetle then uses his three forward pointing 'horns' to roll rabbit or sheep droppings to the nest. He will also use these appendages to win the favours of a female!



Photo © Mike Edwards