

# Hampstead Heath

Conservation

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Species

## CONSERVATION INFORMATION

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Woodland  
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Birds  
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Animals



# Habitats on the Heath



From the C17th until the late C19th there were very few trees on Hampstead Heath, which supported a mosaic of rich heathland communities. When it came into public ownership, grazing declined, allowing trees and shrubs to become established in the C20th. Hampstead Heath today comprises a mosaic of grassland, woodland, scrub, hedgerows, ponds and wetland habitats, with remnant areas of the original heathland habitat.

## Grassland and Heathland

Small areas of acid grassland are of particular note, with plants such as heath bedstraw, oval

sedge and tormentil. Attempts are being made to retain, restore and extend these areas where possible. Recent work by the City of London and the Heath Hands volunteers has reinstated small areas of the rare heathland habitat which gives Hampstead Heath its name. On both sides of Spaniards Road heather flowers now provide a burst of late summer colour. These replanted areas would be greatly enhanced by increasing connectivity between the parcels of habitat. The remnants of a bog on West Heath contain several species of bog-moss and water horsetail.



# Habitats on the Heath

## Woodlands

Most woodland on Hampstead Heath is ecologically relatively new and is made up of birch, oaks and sycamore. Scrub across Hampstead Heath is rather limited. Often negatively regarded as merely 'encroachment' with associated loss of grassland, scrub in the right context actually forms an important habitat on the Heath, providing refuges for birds, with reduced disturbance from people and dogs.

## Hedgerows

The hedgerows across Hampstead Heath are typically dominated by hawthorn, with holly and elder. Some support the high level of

species diversity associated with ancient hedgerows, with wild service tree, hornbeam and midland hawthorn present. A particularly good network of hedges remains on the Heath Extension. There are over 800 identified veteran trees on the Heath.

## Ponds

There are over 30 ponds on Hampstead Heath ranging in size and character.



# Species on the Heath



## Fungi and Plants on the Heath

Over 350 species of fungi have been recorded on Hampstead Heath, including the rare bracket fungus *Ganoderma lucidum*.

Woodland areas contain plants such as broad leaved helleborine, lady fern, hard fern and lily of the valley. Some of the Heath's grasslands are coloured by cowslips, black knapweed and oxeye daisy. Devil's-bit scabious is found on Sandy Heath. A regionally important population of pignut is found on the middle slopes of the Heath. Wetland areas hold marsh marigolds, purple loosetrife and water mint.

## Invertebrates on the Heath

A quarter of Britain's spiders have been found on Hampstead Heath, including the tube-web spider *Atypus affinis* at its only known London site. Twenty three species of butterfly, including breeding colonies of the woodland species purple hairstreak can be seen. Grassland species, such as meadow brown and gatekeeper have shown increases in numbers since mowing regimes have been relaxed.





# Species on the Heath

Grasshoppers and cricket numbers have also increased with six species recorded, including the common green grasshopper, which is in national decline. Seventeen species of dragonfly and damselfly have been recorded at ponds across the Heath. This is only two species less than the list for the whole of the neighbouring county of Hertfordshire.

## Birds on the Heath

Over 180 bird species have been recorded on Hampstead Heath. All three species of woodpecker breed here. Garden warbler and blackcap are summer visitors to the woodland.

Scrub areas support small numbers of whitethroat and sometimes lesser whitethroat. The ancient woodland in the Kenwood Estate holds populations of jackdaw and stock dove, neither of which are common in London. Hedgerows support bullfinch and song thrush which have both shown a rapid decline in the UK recently. Birds of prey include kestrels, sparrowhawks and, increasingly, hobby.

The wetlands have breeding great crested grebes, reed warbler and common tern and 2001 saw the welcome return of breeding kingfishers, which made use of a sand-bank specially constructed to offer them a suitable nest site.





# Species on the Heath

In the winter ponds hold shoveler, gadwall, pochard and rarely, goldeneye. Migration can be exciting on the heath with large numbers of swallows and meadow pipits. A wide variety of species can pass through including regular wheatear and redstart and occasional whinchat, redpoll and woodcock. Siskin, redwings and fieldfare are common on hedgerows in the winter.

## Animals on the Heath

Hampstead Heath is renowned as one of the best places to see bats in London and Natterer's, Daubenton's, noctule, and both species of pipistrelle are present.

Moles, foxes, hedgehogs and occasional muntjac deer are other mammals found on the Heath. The fascinating and totally harmless grass snake is found here at one of its closest locations to the centre of London.

Future management of the Heath will need to consider methods to protect and enhance the ecological diversity whilst balancing the demands for formal and informal recreation activities. The City of London faces this difficult task of protecting the integrity of the Heath's nature resource whilst encouraging contact with wildlife.