

Welcome to Cooper's Hill

Cooper's Hill is the largest remaining open heathland in Bedfordshire and is recognised as a nationally important Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The whole area of heathland and woodland is only 12.5 hectares (31 acres) yet supports many specialist plants and animals.

Lowland heathland declined dramatically during the last century and is now one of Britain's most threatened habitats. Cooper's Hill is the best remaining example of the heaths that once stretched across Bedfordshire along the Greensand Ridge. Many others have been lost under the plough, turned into forestry plantations, or lost due to neglect.

To thrive heathlands need to be managed; historically this was through grazing and cutting for fuel and bedding. Nowadays we retain the open heath by removing invasive trees, scrub and bracken. The aim is a balance between heath and woodland; left unchecked the trees and scrub would take over at the expense of the heather. On the open heath saplings are removed and mature trees thinned to reduce the leaf- and seed-fall, leaving the occasional isolated tree. Bracken allows little else to survive beneath it and so is cut or pulled annually where it creeps out from the woodland. The mosaic of mature heath, young heath, grass and bare ground is maintained to create a variety of habitat niches.

How can I help protect Cooper's Hill?

When visiting the reserve keep to the footpaths and take all your litter with you. When cycling please keep to the bridleway as the sandy soil is prone to erosion. For the sake of wildlife please keep your dog under close control (best control is on a lead) and pick up after them. Bins are provided at the main exits.

Take part in the volunteer work parties which help manage Cooper's Hill or get involved with ecology surveys.

Join the Wildlife Trust BCN to ensure we are able to look after this and other local reserves into the future at

www.wildlifebcn.org/membership.

How to find the reserve

OS sheet 153: TL 028 376

On the western outskirts of Amphill, Bedfordshire. From the A507 take the B5309 (Woburn Street) towards Amphill town centre. After 400 metres the reserve is on your right, park in one of the laybys or Amphill Park car park opposite. The main entrance is immediately adjacent to the Rugby Club, walk down the Public Bridleway for 200 metres to reach the reserve. The site can also be accessed from the Alameda and Station Road in Amphill. Bedford to Luton buses stop in Amphill. Bike and horse riders please keep to the bridleways.

For more information about Cooper's Hill see

www.wildlifebcn.org/reserves/coopers-hill or contact us at The Wildlife Trust, Priory Country Park, Barkers Lane, Bedford, MK41 9DJ, telephone 01234 364213, or e-mail: bedfordshire@wildlifebcn.org.

To join the Wildlife Trust contact:

The Manor House, Broad Street, Great Cambourne, Cambridge, CB23 6DH.
Call: 01954 713500
Email: membership@wildlifebcn.org
Website: www.wildlifebcn.org
Follow us @wildlifebcn
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Cooper's Hill is owned by Amphill Town Council and managed by The Wildlife Trust.



Supported by:



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Cooper's Hill Nature Reserve

www.wildlifebcn.org

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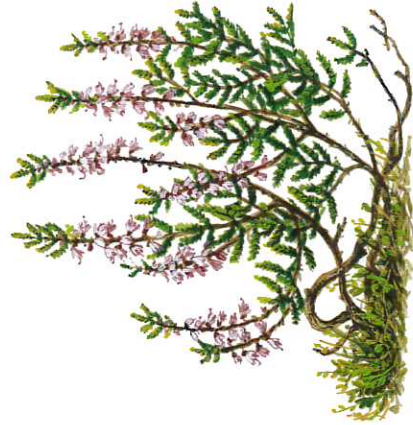


Cooper's Hill nature trail

1 As you climb out of the wood you'll pass areas of acid grassland giving way to heather further up. Both habitats are an important component of the heathland supporting many specialist plants and animals. These rare habitats are found here due to the light sandy soil, which is acidic and low in nutrients making it hostile to other plants. From the top of the ridge through the trees you can look west along the Greensand Ridge which runs between Leighton Buzzard and Gamlingay.

2 As you walk along this stretch you get some of the best views of the open heath. It is managed by careful cutting or burning the old heather in small patches to stimulate new growth and provide a mosaic of age structures. Uncontrolled fires can be a serious hazard so burning is only allowed under very strict control.

3 The heathland contains pockets of gorse and broom providing splashes of yellow when in flower. These scrubby patches are managed by periodically cutting back older growth to maintain young healthy bushes, supporting birds and pollinating insects through the year. If left uncontrolled this scrub would slowly creep out at the expense of the open heather. From here you can take a shortcut down to the war memorial at the end of the Alameda walk.



Common heather



5 A small plantation of pine trees here and the war memorial behind them reminds us of the turbulent history of the site. Historically known as Ampthill Warren it is likely that grazing by rabbits and other animals kept the heathland open until it was planted with conifers in the nineteenth century. During 1917 the trees were cleared as part of the war effort and the heath was able to recover.

6 Areas of woodland such as this can be found at the edges of the reserve where they provide shelter for birds and insects. Spangle galls on oak leaves and knopper galls on acorns are caused by parasitic wasps laying their eggs on the tree. Fungi thrive here from the iconic fly agaric to brackets of birch polypore on dying trees.



Green woodpecker

7 At the top of the steep hill on your left is a concrete cap showing the location of an old Royal Observatory Corps bunker dug during World War Two. A short detour up the steps also gives a good view back over the open heath. Lots of heather has been lost at the bottom of this slope due to a combination of heather beetle and increased nutrients from leaf litter causing the grass to take over. We combat this by thinning the trees and removing areas of turf to expose bare sand giving the heather seeds a better chance to germinate.



Common lizard

4 The valley at the southern end of the heath contains areas of heather, grass and bare ground leading up to a small copse of oak trees. This mix supports a wide range of species, in particular heathland invertebrates such as the green tiger beetle and solitary bees and wasps which dig their nests in bare sand. Green woodpeckers can often be seen flying up from the ground where they feed and common lizards bask on sunny banks.



Green tiger beetle