



for birds  
for people  
for ever

# THAMES BASIN HEATHS



rspb.org.uk/ThamesBasinHeaths



Dartford Warbler

rspb.org.uk/ChrisGinnell

*an ancient  
landscape  
facing  
extinction?*

For more information:  
telephone 01273 783622

[www.rspb.org.uk/thamesbasinheaths](http://www.rspb.org.uk/thamesbasinheaths)



Woodlark

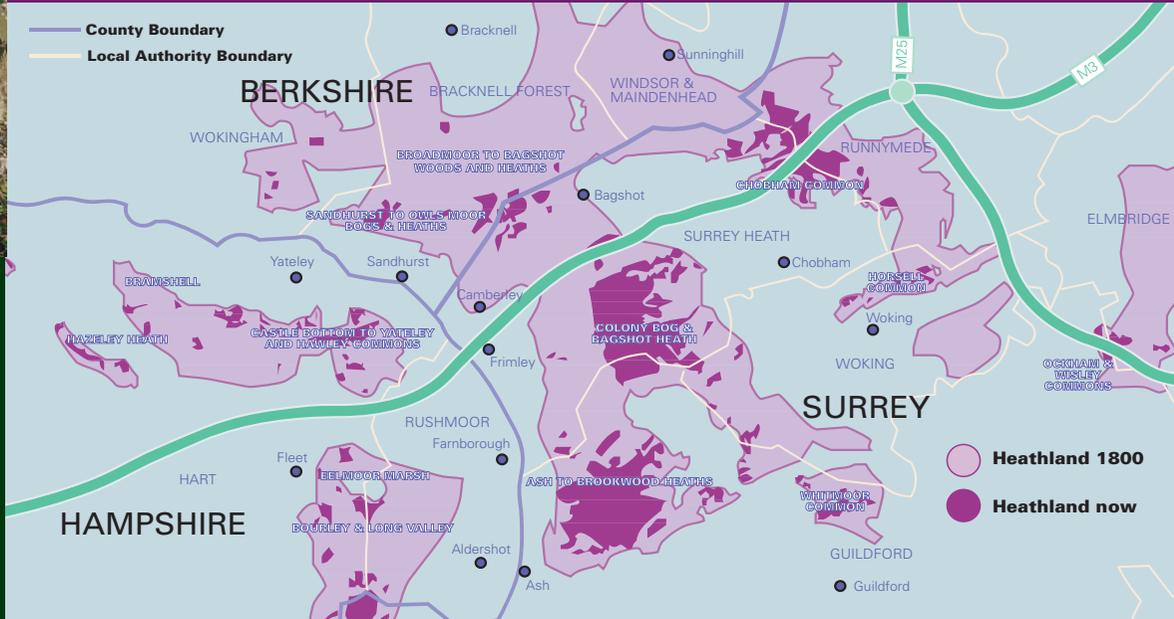
### Lowland heathland

Lowland heathland is a globally rare habitat that provides a home for a unique range of specially adapted wildlife. If the heathlands are lost, so is the wildlife.

Heathland once covered vast areas of southern England. Since the 1800s, forestry, agricultural intensification, urban development have contributed to the loss of 75% of this precious resource. The decline in traditional land uses, such as grazing, has also allowed many heaths to become overgrown.

# Thames Basin Heaths

The network of heathland sites across Hampshire, Surrey and Berkshire are known as the Thames Basin Heaths. Together, they are one of the most important wildlife sites in Europe, and a vital remnant of an historic landscape.



The Thames Basin Heaths are legally protected because of internationally important populations of three of the UK's rarest breeding birds: Dartford warbler, nightjar and woodlark. They are also home to a range of other specialist heathland wildlife, including smooth snakes, sand lizards and silver-studded blue butterflies.

The Thames Basin Heaths are a fantastic place for local people and visitors to appreciate and enjoy the beauty of heathlands and their remarkable wildlife.

## Thames Basin Heaths under threat

Heathlands are fragile places and can be damaged easily.

Walkers, horse-riders and dog-walkers can all unwittingly damage the areas they enjoy visiting so much through overuse.

As the number of people living near to the Thames Basin Heaths increases, so do the threats to the heathlands and the wildlife that depends

on them for their survival. Uncontrolled fires, fly tipping and the "invasion" of garden plants all damage the heaths, slowly destroying their special nature as the local population increases.

As the birds that depend on the heathland all nest on or near to the ground, they are at particular risk from cats and dogs as they often disturb nesting birds or even eat the

eggs or chicks. With more visitors and more local residents, there will be more cats and dogs and the risk to heathland wildlife will be that much greater.

Plans to build at least 40,000 new homes around the Thames Basin Heaths mean that these pressures will only get worse.



rspb-images.com/Andy Hay



rspb-images.com/Andy Hay

Silver-studded Blue Butterfly



rspb-images.com/Andy Hay

Sand Lizard

## The way forward

**The current housing development proposals for the area surrounding the Thames Basin Heaths are unsustainable. A solution that takes account of housing needs and ensures the survival of the heaths is needed now.**

This solution must:

- Provide additional public open spaces for recreation to reduce the visitor pressure on the heaths.
- Limit the damage by current and future users of the Thames Basin Heaths. This will involve measures that encourage people to use the heaths more sensitively including information boards, waymarking and minor alterations to some car parks.
- Ensure that existing landowners maintain the Thames Basin Heaths in the best possible condition.

To secure the future of the heathlands, for wildlife and people, these actions must be coordinated across all the local authorities in the Thames Basin Heaths area. The RSPB is working hard to achieve a consensus between local authorities, developers, local people and conservation bodies.

**We urge you to support the RSPB in our efforts to protect the Thames Basin Heaths. Without urgent action to safeguard the heaths, their unique wildlife will disappear forever.**

For further information about the Thames Basin Heaths and how to protect them please contact Joanna Crouch 01273 763622 or e-mail [joanna.crouch@rspb.org.uk](mailto:joanna.crouch@rspb.org.uk)

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