

Ashdown Forest wildlife

There is a great deal of wildlife to look out for in the forest. The two distinct habitats, heathland and forest, have their own characteristics. The Conservators work hard to preserve the balance of 60% heathland and 40% forest.

Heathland wildlife

There are 770 hectares of heathland in Ashdown Forest, between 2 and 5 % of all that still remains in Britain. This section gives an explanation of some of the wildlife to look out for in the Heathland areas of the Forest.

Heather

Some of the most common plants on the heathland are members of the heather family. Ling Heather is the most common but also Bell Heather and Cross-leaved Heather can be found.

They grow well on the poor, acidic and sandy soils that characterise the heathlands. Heather was traditionally used for bedding, thatch, brooms, fuel, baskets, rope, orange dye and to flavour ale.

August is the best time to see the heather as it comes into full bloom at this time of the year.



Ling Heather

Gorse

Two types of gorse are also particularly common, Common Gorse and Dwarf Gorse.

There is a popular expression 'kissing is out of favour when gorse is out of bloom'.



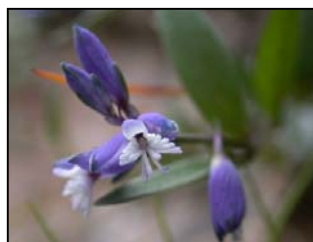
Common Gorse

Other plants

The most common type of grass is Purple Moor Grass. Among the grasses look out for Tormentil, Heath Milkwort and Heath Bedstraw.



Tormentil



Heath Milkwort



Heath Bedstraw

Marsh Gentian

The most famous plant in Ashdown Forest is the Marsh Gentian.

It has been getting more and more scarce in Sussex over the years and has now disappeared from West Sussex altogether. The Forest does still have a reasonably abundant colony, look out for the bright blue trumpet flowers.



Marsh Gentian

Trees in the forest woodlands

Although the forest areas are extensive the variety of trees has changed over the years. This is mainly due to the effects of man, for example, clearance for the charcoal required for the iron industry. Try your hand at some tree spotting!

Scots Pine

The most common and easily recognisable tree is the Scots Pine. They were planted mainly in the 19th century.

Scots Pine need careful management, and when the seedlings invade the heathland they are chopped down and used as Christmas trees.



Birch

Silver Birch, and Downy Birch are also common. The Downy Birch can be found in damper areas of the Forest.

Silver Birch twigs are hairless but bear tiny warts and vice versa for Downy. The leaf edges in the Downy Birch only have a single series of teeth - they are double-toothed in Silver Birch.



Beech

Beech can be found on the fringes of the Forest. The tree actually produces an edible nut, the Beech Nut. Although eaten by deer and squirrels it is also edible for humans who have enough patience to remove the shell!

Oak

The forest contains many Oak trees, one of the traces of the former forest.

The English Oak supports the greatest diversity of organisms of any tree in the forest.



Sweet Chestnut

Sweet Chestnut was planted by the Romans to harvest for oil. They are still planted on the Forest fringes for man's use.

The trees are coppiced on 15 year cycles and the wood is used for fences and stakes and recently for the inspiring ESCC Woodland Enterprise Centre building at Flimwell



Ashdown Forest birds

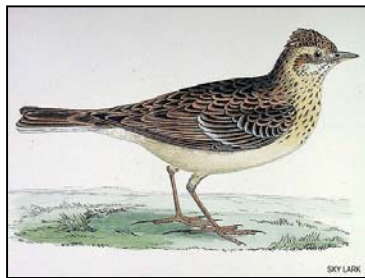
There are a wide variety of birds in the Forest, including some particularly rare species. This bird finder sheet will help you identify some of the species.

Skylarks and **Meadow Pipits** are common on the heathland. Meadow Pipits have a high accelerating song ending in a trill 'weesk weesk weesk'. This is given in flight.

Reed Buntings and **Yellowhammers** are also common in the scrub.

Rare species to look out for are the **Woodcock**, **Dartford Warbler** and **Nightjar**. In summer listen out for the churring sound of the Nightjar as it swoops and glides.

In the Forest areas look out for **Grey Wagtails**. They can be found around the ponds and streams.



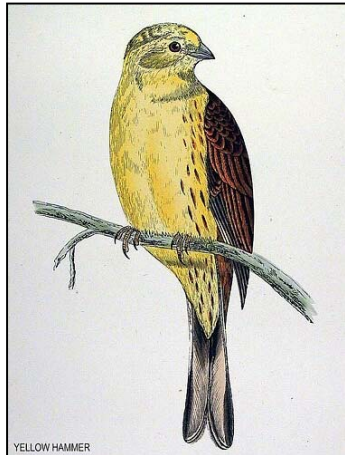
Skylark



Meadow Pipit



Reed Bunting



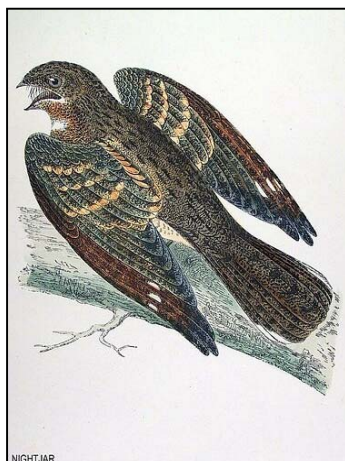
Yellow Hammer



Woodcock



Dartford Warbler



Nightjar



Grey Wagtail

Ashdown Forest deer and other wildlife

Deer

Deer have always been an important part of the Forest landscape. Fallow Deer are then most common species in the Forest.

Introduced by the Normans (and possibly the Romans), they have been hunted right up to the 17th century. The edges of the Forest were lined with a stake-lined ditch that allowed deer to enter but not leave.



There are now up to 1000 Fallow Deer in the Forest. They are the largest wild animal in Britain. Some other species such as the tiny Muntjac can also be found.

If you go onto the forest at dawn or dusk and move about quietly you may well see wild fallow deer. This is also a good time to see bats feeding.

The very word 'forest' came from the Normans. They used it to denote an area of trees containing deer for hunting!

Other wildlife

Many of the Forest's mammals such as foxes, badgers and bats are nocturnal.

There are also many species of butterflies, damselflies, dragonflies and moths. Look out for the very rare Purple Emperor butterfly.

The heathland contains Adders, the only poisonous snake in the British Isles. It is recognisable by the dark zig-zag along its length. They are very shy and only bite if they are attacked. There have been no deaths from adder bites in Britain for over 20 years.



Purple Emperor



Adder