

Black Heath Wenhaston Management Plan 2023 – 33

To be reviewed in 2028

**Wenhaston
Commons
Group**



Suffolk
Wildlife Trust

Black Heath

Factual summary

Map reference	TM422748
Area	15.75ha / 38.9 acres approximately
Land tenure	Black Heath is a registered common under the Common's Registration Act 1965. Previously managed by then Suffolk Coastal District Council (now East Suffolk Council) and now Wenhaston Parish Council under a Scheme for the Regulation and Management of Common Land
Designations	County Wildlife Site
Obligations	The Parish Council as managers of the Commons under the Scheme for Regulation and Management is obliged to protect the Commons, maintain them free from encroachment, guarantee that the inhabitants of the district have a free right of access to the land and may enjoy various sorts of recreation subject to the bye laws and to preserve as far as possible objects of historical and ecological interest.
Legal constraints	As the land is Registered Common Land management is constrained by the requirements of the Commons Act 1876 and 1899 the Law of Property Act 1925 and the Commons Registration Act 1965
Commoners' rights	Two commoners have registered rights, but these have not been exercised for many years
Access	Open access managed by a series of informal footpaths

Black Heath is the largest of the five Wenhaston commons at 15.75ha (38.9 acres). Black Heath Road splits the common into two areas the north being the larger at 11.6 ha (10.25 acres)

History

Black Heath is a remnant of Sandlings heath, a habitat that once stretched from Ipswich to Lowestoft. Lowland heathland is a rare habitat with the UK holding a significant proportion of the global resource but some 83% of Sandlings heaths vanished between the 1930's and 1980's. Much of this was lost through agriculture, building, forestry, air bases and golf courses and the remainder suffered through a lack of management. In the 1980's a massive effort was made to restore the remaining areas, reducing the invasive trees and bracken enabling the true heathland species to thrive. This effort was made by the Sandlings Group which consisted of Suffolk Wildlife Trust, RSPB, National Trust, local councils, Forestry Commission and some private landowners. Within ten years some 80% of the remaining

areas was under some form of management much of which became designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or County Wildlife Site (CWS).

It was at this time the Wenhaston Commons Group was formed consisting of interested villagers supported by the then Suffolk Coastal District Council (SCDC) with the intention of managing the habitat on their doorstep. Assisting the Commons Group areas of gorse and birch were removed by volunteers under the Governments Manpower Services teams designed to provide unemployed with work leading to future employment.

In 2012 SCDC passed the Scheme of Regulation to the parish council, Suffolk Wildlife Trust were brought in to help with the management of Black Heath including securing grant aid by way of a Countryside Stewardship Scheme and working alongside the group.

Since that time significant progress has been made in restoring the heath boosted by a gift from the late Bernard and Bess Tickner to the Commons Group enabling new machinery to be purchased making management more effective and efficient. Fires in 2016 and 2019 destroyed a large area of old gorse to the north of the sand pit which created an opportunity to scrape the ground back to mineral soil and allow dormant heather seed to germinate, this has resulted in an area attracting up to two pairs of woodlark which have bred with varying success. A further area in the northeast corner was scraped and reseeded in the winter 2021/22

The purchase of a bracken bruiser towed behind an ATV (all terrain vehicle/quad bike) has had a marked effect in reducing the bracken cover and control of gorse has aimed at providing fire breaks to reduce the effects of further fires.

In 2014 it was decided to open the old sand pit that had become overgrown with gorse for the purpose of attracting sand martins to breed. This has been successful and between 20-40 pairs have bred annually since that time.

In 1984 silver studded blue butterflies were introduced to the site from a colony that was going to be destroyed as part of the development of Martlesham Heath village. That colony established but by 2015 numbers had dropped to single figure daily counts and so a project was set up using money donated by the late Bernard Tickner to introduce some insects from Minsmere onto the south side of the heath. This has proved successful with the colony growing and expanding and peak daily counts in 2022 were over 60 individuals

Ecological value

Black Heath sits just outside the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Natural Character Area. It is one of the driest parts of the country, with local rainfall typically only two thirds of the national average. The distinctive landscape character is a product of its underlying geology, shaped by the effects of the sea and the interactions of people.

Black Heath vegetation includes both heathers, Ling *Calluna vulgaris* and Bell heather *Erica cinerea*, both gorse species Common gorse *Ulex europaeus* and Western gorse *Ulex gallii*,

Harebell *Campanula rotundifolia*, Heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile*, Sheeps sorrel *Rumex acetosella* and Sand sedge *Carex arenaria*.

The site has all the typical heathland plant species and but also demonstrates how if unmanaged heathland soon reverts to woodland. For the past 20 years prior to the crash in the rabbit population it was recognised that their grazing was impacting on the heathers ability to regenerate and so several fenced exclosures were erected to reduce the impact. Once the heather had re-established the fencing was removed.

A full breeding bird survey was undertaken in 2022 (see appendix) previously only woodlark and sand martins were monitored. Woodlark have held territories since 2019 with up to two males present, they successfully bred in 2020 producing two broods, pairs have held territories every spring since that time but not proven to have successfully bred. Nightingale numbers have varied from year to year with between 2 and 5 singing males

Butterfly transects have been regularly undertaken including monitoring of the silver studded blue butterfly.

Reptiles are monitored monthly during the season using refugia (tins) with slow worm being the most frequently observed. There is only one recent record of adder when an individual was found dead on the road in 2015.

There are anecdotal records of great crested newts in the Black Deek pond and they occur in garden ponds around the site, however the pond does dry out every summer and is infested with New Zealand pygmy weed (*Crassula helmsii*) and so is unlikely to be a breeding pond.

There have been no recent vegetation surveys undertaken.

Objectives

- To continue to maintain the areas for the community for recreation and wildlife.
- To maintain and increase the areas of heathers and acid grassland
- To manage gorse in a variety of successional stages
- To monitor the wildlife on an annual basis by carrying out breeding bird surveys particularly woodlark and sand martin, monitor reptiles and butterflies.
- To maintain the pit for sand martins
- To maintain and increase the silver studded blue butterfly population
- To set up a series of fixed point photograph project
- To maintain the path network in a safe and usable condition.
- Maintain fire breaks adjacent to habitation

The objectives need to be achievable given that some of the management work is to be undertaken by volunteers and so a realistic work programme is required. The easiest way to record change particularly where management is carried out is to take a series of fixed-point photographs. These are far more reliable than human memory and can act as demonstration that the management is working particularly if there is any local opposition to change.

Vision

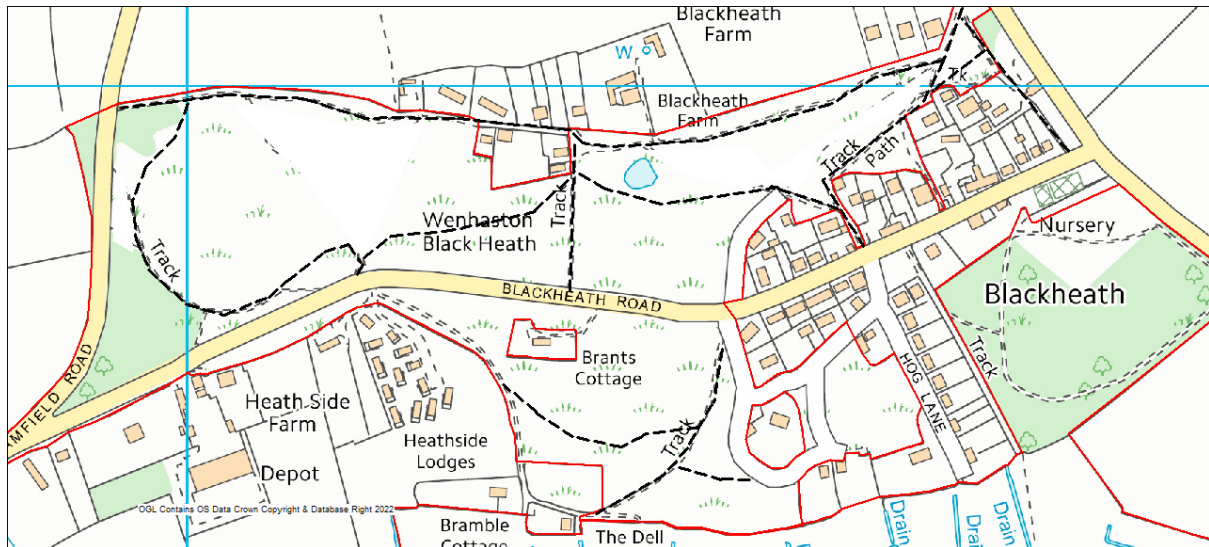
To maintain the site as an example of Sandlings heath with its existing flora and fauna and improve the habitat with the objective of attracting new or lost species. Maintaining the existing path network will ensure much of the habitat remains undisturbed to the benefit of wildlife.

Management

In first year set up a fixed-point photography project to cover all the main areas of the heath and repeat winter and summer to maintain record of management.

Consider erecting exclosures around new heather areas if the rabbit population recovers and is preventing the heather re-establishing.

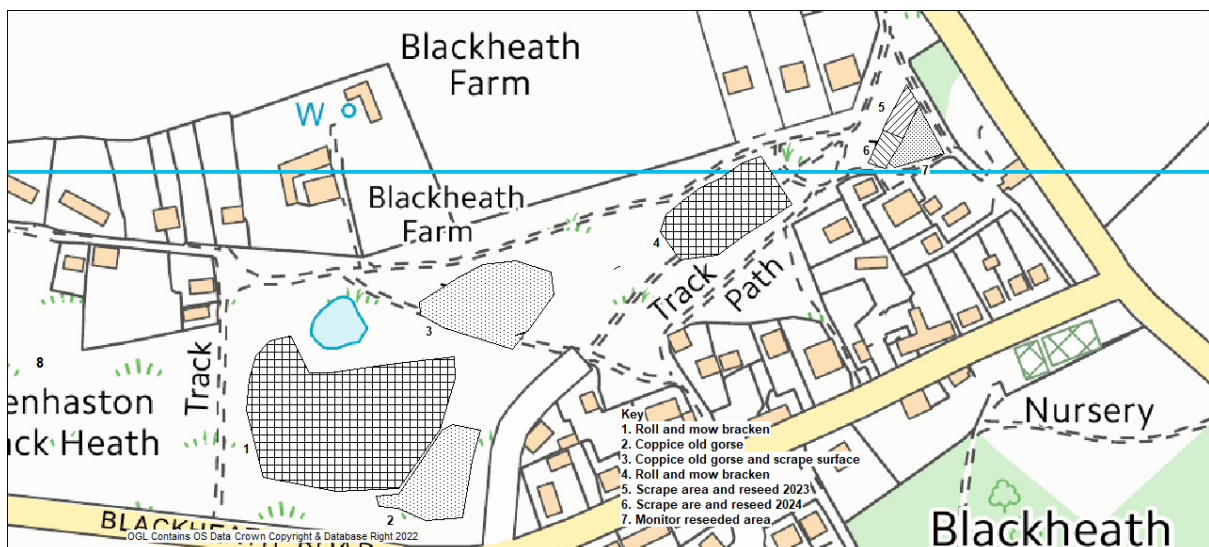
Annually maintain a good footpath network to encourage walkers to stick to main routes, reducing the threat to ground nesting birds. Map 1.



Map 1. Paths to be maintained

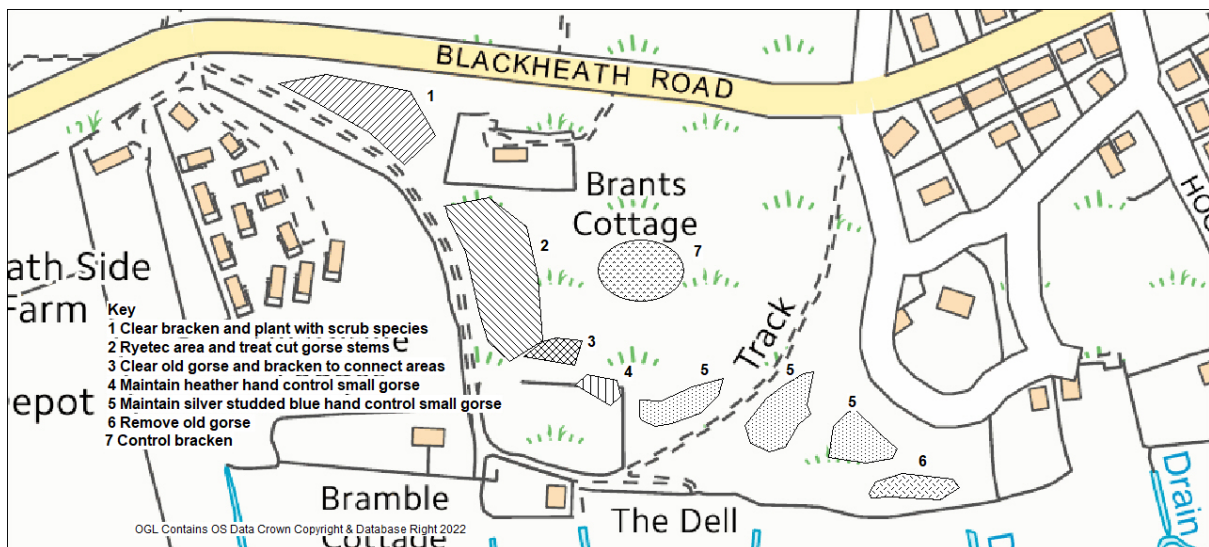
Northeast compartment

- **Area 1.** Roll bracken with bracken bruiser at least twice each summer between late June and August, monitor for presence of woodlark before each operation
- **Area 2.** Coppice old gorse over the next 5 years.
- **Area 3.** Coppice old gorse over the next 10 years.
- **Area 4.** Roll bracken with bracken bruiser at least twice each summer between late June and August, monitor for presence of woodlark before each operation
- **Area 5.** Scrape area down to mineral soil and deposit material into a bund to the west of the path in year one. Consider reseeding dependant on success of seeding on the 2021 scrape area 7.
- **Area 6.** Scrape area down to mineral soil and deposit material into a bund to the west of the path in year two. Consider reseeding dependant on success of seeding on the 2021 scrape area 7.
- **Area 7.** Monitor reseeded area and manage gorse regrowth by hand if too prolific



South Compartment

- **Area 1.** Clear bracken area and plant with scrub species, hawthorn, blackthorn etc, manage planting annually and replace failures
- **Area 2.** Ryetec gorse and follow up with stump treatment if necessary
- **Area 3.** Clear old gorse and manage bracken to create corridors to encourage silver studded blue butterflies to expand their range.
- **Area 4.** Maintain heather control gorse by hand to prevent impacting silver studded blues.
- **Area 5.** Maintain original butterfly release site by hand or where feasible using pedestrian mower.
- **Area 6.** Remove old gorse and treat stumps
- **Area 7.** Roll bracken with bracken bruiser at least twice each summer between late June and August, monitor for presence of woodlark before each operation



Black Deek Pond

The pond although has held great crested newts in the past is now heavily infested with New Zealand pygmy weed (*Crassula helmsii*) and now dries up completely each summer, a pond just a short distance away on private land is also infested with this alien plant and so unless there is a guaranteed method of controlling the weed in both ponds there is little to be gained by trying to manage the pond.

However, the small area of grassland does support a colony of common spotted orchid and this should be mown and the arisings removed every August/September by volunteers.

Black Heath Annual management tasks and timings												
Task	Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Coppice/remove gorse	█	█									█	█
Reface sand martin pit		█	█	█								
Carry out bird survey			█	█	█	█	█					
Monitor butterflies				█	█	█	█	█	█			
Monitor reptiles				█	█	█	█	█	█			
Roll / Ryetec bracken								█	█			
Plant scrub	█	█									█	█
Ryetec small gorse & treat									█	█	█	
Surface scraping	█	█								█	█	█
Heather reseeding with litter										█	█	
Mow area adjacent to pond								█	█			
Remove enclosure	█	█										

Appendix

Plants

There are no recent plant surveys available and so an up-to-date survey should be undertaken within the first two years of this plan.

BLACKHEATH - LAST RECORDED 24/04/06 TO 25/09/06	
SCIENTIFIC NAME	COMMON NAME
<i>Aegopodium podagraria</i>	Ground Elder
<i>Agrimonia eupatoria</i>	Agrimony
<i>Agrostis capillaris</i>	Common Bent
<i>Agrostis stolonifera</i>	Creeping Bent
<i>Aira caryophyllea</i>	Silver Hair-grass
<i>Aira praecox</i>	Early Hair-grass
<i>Anthoxanthum odoratum</i>	Sweet Vernal-grass
<i>Anthriscus sylvestris</i>	Cow Parsley
<i>Aphanes inexpectata</i>	Slender Parsley-piert
<i>Arrhenatherum elatius subsp.bulbosum</i>	Onion Couch
<i>Arum maculatum</i>	Lords-and-ladies
<i>Ballota nigra</i>	Black Horehound
<i>Bromus hordeaceus</i>	Soft-brome
<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>	Heather
<i>Campanula rotundifolia</i>	Harebell
<i>Carex arenaria</i>	Sand Sedge
<i>Castanea sativa</i>	Sweet Chestnut
<i>Centaurea nigra</i>	Common Knapweed

<i>Ceratocapnos claviculata</i>	Climbing Croydalis
<i>Chamerion angustifolium</i>	Rosebay Willowherb
<i>Chelidonium majus</i>	Greater Celandine
<i>Chenopodium album</i> agg.	<i>Chenopodium album</i> agg.
<i>Cirsium vulgare</i>	Spear Thistle
<i>Conium maculatum</i>	Hemlock
<i>Crassula helmsii</i>	New Zealand Pigmyweed
<i>Crassula tillaea</i>	Mossy Stonecrop
<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	Hawthorn
<i>Crepis vesicaria</i>	Beaked Hawk's-beard
<i>Cytisus scoparius</i>	Broom
<i>Dactylorhiza fuchsii</i>	Common Spotted Orchid
<i>Digitalis purpurea</i>	Foxglove
<i>Dryopteris dilatata</i>	Broad Buckler-fern
<i>Elytrigia repens</i>	Common Couch
<i>Erica cinerea</i>	Bell Heather
<i>Erodium cicutarium</i>	Common Stork's-bill
<i>Fallopia convolvulus</i>	Black Bindweed
<i>Filago minima</i>	Small Cudweed
<i>Galanthus nivalis</i>	Snowdrop
<i>Galium aparine</i>	Cleavers
<i>Galium saxatile</i>	Heath Bedstraw
<i>Galium verum</i>	Lady's Bedstraw
<i>Geranium molle</i>	Dove's-foot Crane's-bill
<i>Geum urbanum</i>	Herb Bennet
<i>Glechoma hederacea</i>	Ground Ivy
<i>Hedera helix</i>	Ivy
<i>Helleborus foetidus</i>	Stinking Hellebore
<i>Heracleum sphondylium</i>	Hogweed
<i>Holcus lanatus</i>	Yorkshire Fog
<i>Hordeum murinum</i>	Wall Barley
<i>Hyacinthoides non-scripta</i>	Bluebell
<i>Hypericum humifusum</i>	Trailing St John`s-wort
<i>Hypochaeris glabra</i>	Smooth Cat's-ear
<i>Hypochaeris radicata</i>	Cat's-ear
<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>	Holly
<i>Juncus acutiflorus</i>	Sharp-flowered Rush
<i>Lamium album</i>	White Dead Nettle
<i>Lamium purpureum</i>	Red Dead-nettle
<i>Lolium perenne</i>	Perennial Ryegrass
<i>Lonicera periclymenum</i>	Honeysuckle
<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>	Bird`s-foot-trefoil
<i>Lythrum portula</i>	Water Purslane
<i>Malus domestica</i>	Apple
<i>Malva sylvestris</i>	Common Mallow
<i>Mercurialis perennis</i>	Dog's Mercury

<i>Molinia caerulea</i>	Purple Moorgrass
<i>Myosotis ramosissima</i>	Early Forget-me-not
<i>Narcissus</i> agg.	Narcissus
<i>Persicaria maculosa</i>	Redshank
<i>Phleum bertolonii</i>	Smaller Cat`s-tail
<i>Pilosella officinarum</i>	Mouse-ear Hawkweed
<i>Pimpinella saxifraga</i>	Burnet Saxifrage
<i>Plantago coronopus</i>	Buck`s-horn Plantain
<i>Polygala serpyllifolia</i>	Heath Milkwort
<i>Polygonum arenastrum</i>	Equal-leaved Knotgrass
<i>Potentilla argentea</i>	Hoary Cinquefoil
<i>Potentilla erecta</i> subsp. <i>erecta</i>	Tormentil
<i>Potentilla reptans</i>	Creeping Cinquefoil
<i>Pteridium aquilinum</i>	Bracken
<i>Quercus robur</i>	Pedunculate Oak
<i>Ranunculus bulbosus</i>	Bulbous Buttercup
<i>Ranunculus ficaria</i>	Lesser Celandine
<i>Ranunculus repens</i>	Creeping Buttercup
<i>Reseda luteola</i>	Weld
<i>Rosa canina</i> agg.	<i>Rosa canina</i> agg.
<i>Rubus fruticosus</i> agg.	<i>Rubus fruticosus</i> agg.
<i>Rumex acetosa</i>	Common Sorrel
<i>Rumex acetosella</i>	Sheep`s Sorrel
<i>Sambucus nigra</i>	Elder
<i>Scleranthus annuus</i> subsp. <i>polycarpus</i>	<i>Scleranthus annuus</i> subsp. <i>polycarpus</i>
<i>Senecio jacobaea</i>	Ragwort
<i>Senecio sylvaticus</i>	Heath Groundsel
<i>Senecio vulgaris</i>	Groundsel
<i>Smyrniolum olusatrum</i>	Alexanders
<i>Sonchus asper</i>	Prickly Sow Thistle
<i>Sonchus oleraceus</i>	Smooth Sow Thistle
<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>	Rowan
<i>Spergularia rubra</i>	Sand Spurrey
<i>Stellaria graminea</i>	Lesser Stitchwort
<i>Stellaria holostea</i>	Greater Stitchwort
<i>Stellaria media</i>	Common Chickweed
<i>Taraxacum</i> agg.	Dandelion
<i>Trisetum flavescens</i>	Yellow Oat Grass
<i>Ulex europaeus</i>	Gorse
<i>Ulex gallii</i>	Western Gorse
<i>Ulmus minor</i> sensu Stace	Smooth-leaved or Small-leaved Elm
<i>Urtica dioica</i>	Common Nettle
<i>Veronica hederifolia</i>	Ivy-leaved Speedwell
<i>Veronica officinalis</i>	Heath Speedwell
<i>Veronica persica</i>	Common Field Speedwell
<i>Vicia sativa</i> subsp. <i>nigra</i>	Common Vetch

<i>Viola canina</i> subsp. <i>canina</i>	Heath Dog-violet
<i>Viola odorata</i>	Sweet Violet
<i>Viola riviniana</i>	Common Dog Violet
<i>Solidago virgaurea</i>	Goldenrod

Butterfly species recorded on Black Heath since 2017

Twenty-four species have been recorded on site during the past five years, most notably silver studded blue which is now well established again following the reintroduction and grayling. Both species are classified as Vulnerable by Butterfly Conservation. A monthly transect is undertaken throughout the season and all records submitted to Butterfly Conservation. Silver studded blues are the main feature of the site due to the targeted conservation work however they are regarded as Vulnerable by Butterfly Conservation along with Small heath and Grayling is now regarded as Endangered.

SCIENTIFIC NAME	ENGLISH NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	ENGLISH NAME
<i>Thymelicus sylvestris/lineola</i>	Small/Essex Skipper	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>	Holly Blue
<i>Ochlodes sylvanus</i>	Large Skipper	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	Red Admiral
<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>	Brimstone	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>	Painted Lady
<i>Pieris brassicae</i>	Large White	<i>Aglais urticae</i>	Small Tortoiseshell
<i>Pieris rapae</i>	Small White	<i>Inachis io</i>	Peacock
<i>Pieris napi</i>	Green-veined White	<i>Polygonia c-album</i>	Comma
<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>	Orange Tip	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>	Speckled Wood
<i>Callophrys rubi</i>	Green Hairstreak	<i>Hipparchia semele</i>	Grayling
<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>	Small Copper	<i>Pyronia tithonus</i>	Gatekeeper
<i>Plebeius argus</i>	Silver-studded Blue	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>	Meadow Brown
<i>Aricia agestis</i>	Brown Argus	<i>Aphantopus hyperantus</i>	Ringlet
<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>	Common Blue	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>	Small Heath

Reptiles

The refugia were monitored in spring 2022, slow worm were the most frequently encountered in April and May with some 30 individuals recorded along with just a single common lizard and seven sightings of grass snake

Breeding birds

A full common bird census was carried out between 1st April and 23rd June 2022. A total of 34 species were recorded as breeding or holding territory, of which were 7 Red listed species and 7 Amber listed. A full report is on file.

Black Heath Wenhaston Common Bird Census 2022				
Species	Comp NW	Comp NE	Comp S	Totals
Sparrowhawk	1			1
Pheasant			1	1
<i>Stock dove</i>			1	1
<i>Wood pigeon</i>	4	3	5	12
Collared dove		2		2
Turtle dove		1		1
Little owl		1		1
<i>Green woodpecker</i>	1		1	2
Great spotted woodpecker	1	1		2
Wood lark	1			1
Sand martin	25-30			25-30
<i>Wren</i>	11	9	8	28
<i>Dunnock</i>	6	7	4	17
Robin	5	8	6	19
Nightingale		1	1	2
Blackbird	3	4	4	11
<i>Song thrush</i>	3	2	1	6
Mistle thrush	1	1		2
Lesser whitethroat	1	1		2
Whitethroat	1	2		3
Garden warbler	2	2		4
Blackcap	6	2	3	11
Chiffchaff	9	9	6	24
Long tailed tit	1	1	1	3
Blue tit	5	5	5	15
Great tit	4	3	2	9
Magpie	1	1		2
House sparrow		1	3	4
Chaffinch	5	7	5	17
Greenfinch	1	3	1	5
Goldfinch		1		1
Linnet	7	2	1	10
<i>Bullfinch</i>	1	1	1	3
Yellowhammer	2	1		3
Red listed species in bold				
<i>Amber listed species in italics</i>				

