

THE GREAT HEATH

AN URBAN LIVING
LANDSCAPE FOR DORSET



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The Great Heath is "helping all the wildlife live with all the people."
Year 3 pupil,
Somersford Primary
School

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The outstanding achievements of The Great Heath Living Landscape project would not have been possible without the National Lottery players and the Heritage Lottery Fund, along with the generous support of the Erica Trust, Colin Panter, Natural England, the Brockington legacy, The Fine Foundation, Dorset Wildlife Trust members and the local community.

This was a partnership project led by Dorset Wildlife Trust and involved Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, Poole Harbour Commissioners, Borough of Poole, Dorset County Council, The Erica Trust, Bournemouth Borough Council and Christchurch and East Dorset Councils.

Many volunteers helped in various capacities, from surveying to administration and conservation work. You deserve a HUGE pat on the back and a big THANK YOU from all of us.

Thank you to EVERYONE who came along to any of our events, talks, walks and work parties, applied for a wildlife gardening plaque, or just spread the word of The Great Heath (TGH) project. You are the reason TGH was such a success - keep enjoying, conserving and learning!

THANK YOU



The Great Heath Team. L-R: Sally Fear, Katie Wilkinson, Nicky Hoar, Bev Lagden. Inset: Megan Lowe.

Main © Andy Fale. Inset © Rob Skinner.

© Nigel Brooks



INTRODUCTION

The Great Heath once covered most of south-east Dorset, from Purbeck to the New Forest, broken only by river valleys and small settlements. Now it is a diverse landscape of heathland, farmland, woods and wetlands entwined with the conurbation of Poole, Bournemouth, Christchurch and east Dorset.



© Jane Adams



When a significant area of The Great Heath came up for sale by the Canford Estate, Dorset Wildlife Trust formed a partnership to secure these precious wildlife habitats and green spaces. The partners took this unique opportunity to give nature a future across the conurbation by creating Dorset's first urban **'Living Landscape'** for people and wildlife. See map on page 8.



© Andy Fale

And so The Great Heath was born to work in partnership for wildlife and people in Dorset.

AIMS

We want The Great Heath Living Landscape to be rich in wildlife and highly valued, enjoyed and nurtured by people.

CONSERVE



© Ian Julian

Purchase land to secure nature sites for wildlife and people. The nature of The Great Heath is incredible, with some of the most important wildlife habitats in the country right on our doorsteps.

"I want to be able to pass on a Living Landscape for my grandchildren."
Denise Cuthbert, Upton

ENJOY

Improve connections and access to the countryside, creating a network of connected sites with high-quality access and interpretation, linking and improving trails, including the Castleman Trailway and Stour Valley Way.

"The walk through Ashington Cutting to Happy Bottom Nature Reserve was a delight."
Michael, guided walk participant



© Nicky Hoar

LEARN



© Nicky Hoar

Provide new opportunities for everyone to enjoy and learn about our local wildlife and play a part in its conservation.

"There is so much to learn and discover."
Robert Gomm, Ferndown

HABITATS

The Great Heath sites include heathland, woodland and meadow, wetland, harbour and marsh, stretching from Lytchett in the west through Upton, Corfe Mullen, Broadstone and Ferndown to Parley in the east.

589

hectares secured for wildlife and people



© Nicky Hoar

Heathland, formed by nature and man living in harmony for thousands of years and now home to some of the rarest wildlife in the country - including Ferndown Common, Parley Common, Upton Heath, Dunyeats Heath and the former heathland of Arrowsmith Coppice.



© Ian Ballam

Parts of Poole Harbour - the largest natural harbour in Britain, an internationally important refuge for wildlife and a site of great strategic, commercial and leisure value for people. Includes Holes and Lytchett Bays.



© Nicky Hoar

Woods and meadows at Happy Bottom, Ashington Meadow, Delph Woods and Arrowsmith Coppice.

THE GREAT HEATH MAP



1: UPTON HEATH

© Nigel Brooks

DORSET WILDLIFE TRUST

2: DUNYEATS HEATH, ARROWSMITH COPPICE & DELPH WOODS

© Tony Bates MBE

Borough of Poole

amphibian and reptile conservation

3: FERNDOWN COMMON

© Tony Bates MBE

The Erica Trust

amphibian and reptile conservation

4: PARLEY COMMON

The Erica Trust

Dorset County Council

amphibian and reptile conservation

Christchurch and East Dorset Councils
delivering services together

© Chris Dresh

5: LOWER COMMON

DORSET WILDLIFE TRUST

© Ken Dolbear MBE

NATURE PARKS

6: LYTCHETT BAY

amphibian and reptile conservation

Borough of Poole

DORSET WILDLIFE TRUST

© Tony Bates MBE

7: CORFE BARROWS

The Erica Trust

Borough of Poole

DORSET WILDLIFE TRUST

Dorset County Council

amphibian and reptile conservation

Christchurch and East Dorset Councils
delivering services together

© Jane Adams

8: HOLES BAY

DORSET WILDLIFE TRUST

phc

Borough of Poole

© Paul Morton

Logos denote site owners/managers.

FOCUS ON NATURE PARKS

CORFE BARROWS

3
nature
parks
created

Linking eight nature areas around Corfe Mullen and Broadstone, Corfe Barrows Nature Park is a special place for local communities and visitors to explore and enjoy the countryside, its history and its wonderful wildlife.

Formed by nature and man living in harmony for thousands of years, the area is home to some of the rarest wildlife in the country and its Bronze Age barrows bear witness to its long association with people. Woodland, heathland, meadows and pastures can be discovered on footpaths, bridleways and trails, including part of the disused Somerset and Dorset Railway, and there are links to the Castleman Trailway.

[dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk/
Corfe_Barrows_NaturePark](http://dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk/Corfe_Barrows_NaturePark)

The term '**Nature Park**' reflects the value of the area to both people and wildlife. It is not a statutory designation but a public expression of the intention of the partnership to work together to manage the area for its special features and value to people and wildlife.



23 SITES
with new
interpretation and
improved access,
including;

8
new boardwalks

2
new ramps

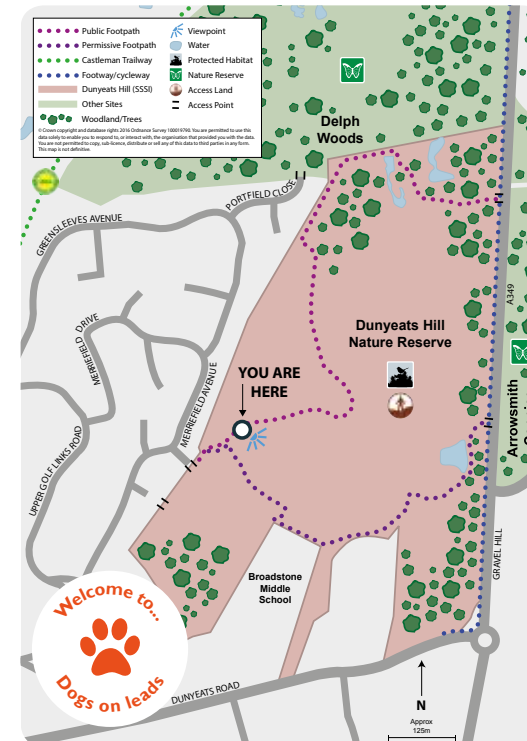
3
new bridges

OPENING THE DOOR TO THE GREAT HEATH

A Living Landscape brings us closer to our neighbouring wildlife, giving both nature and people a future.

To help people get up close and enjoy The Great Heath sites, we have created new information boards, improved access and web pages. Each one has a clear map showing paths and bridleways and how to connect to other sites and trails.

New web pages and leaflets have accessibility gradings for walkers, pawprint icons for dog owners, and information about the wildlife and importance of each site. See page 25 for more information.



GETTING AROUND

The 16.5-mile Castleman Trailway is at the heart of The Great Heath and a fantastic way to discover many of its sites. Following the old Southampton to Dorchester railway line, this gentle route for walkers and riders is now much easier to use, thanks to The Great Heath's access improvements led by Dorset County Council.



New waymarking (made from local wood) and code of conduct signs, plus new bridges, gates and surfacing at key points, help people to enjoy it, whether on horse, bike, foot or wheelchair.



© Bev Lagden



© Nicky Hoar

At Old Ham Lane, The Great Heath Volunteers helped to replace a stile and an eroded bank with steps, an access ramp and a medium-mobility kissing gate.



© D Price

Ian Bennett, who has Hereditary Spastic Paraplegia (HSP), says: "I haven't been able to get close to the Stour in many years. I now use this route regularly and have spotted a kingfisher."



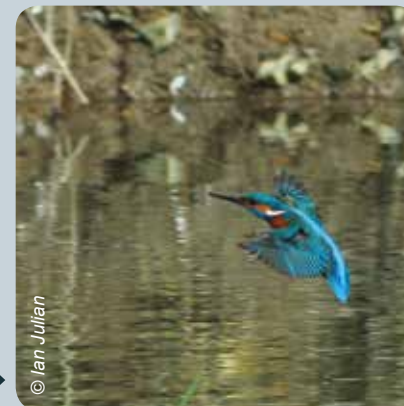
© Bev Lagden

dorsetforyou.gov.uk/castlemantrailway

16 miles of the Castleman Trailway, 64 miles of the Stour Valley Way & 10 miles of other trails waymarked



The Stour Valley Way is a designated footpath that follows almost all of the 64-mile course of the magnificent river Stour.



© Ian Julian

The Stour Valley Way has been improved with new gates replacing some of the stiles, new oak benches and new waymarking for the entire route from Hengistbury Head in Dorset to Stourhead in Wiltshire!



© Stewart Canham



© S Mallison

The updated kingfisher logo now leads you all the way on one of Britain's gentlest long-distance routes from sea to source of Dorset's longest river. Thanks to cooperation with partners outside the project area: National Trust Kingston Lacy and Stourhead estates, Dorset County Council's North Dorset Rangers, and the Rights of Way team in Wiltshire.



© K Martin

stourvalleyway.co.uk

EVENTS

386
events

attended by

18,584
people!

'Wild About' events

Our "Wild about ..." roadshow-style events bring wildlife, fun and discovery to where the people are. From Hengistbury Head to Baiter Park at Poole Harbour, families have had a wild time with us, our partners and community groups across the Living Landscape, finishing up with "Wild about The Great Heath" at Upton Country Park to celebrate the first three years.

Wildlife Gardening Workshop

Another big event has been our annual Wildlife Gardening Workshop with Bournemouth Natural Science Society, which attracted hundreds of people of all ages, from experts to toddlers, for fun and informative wildlife gardening activities and advice, involving community groups and conservation partners.

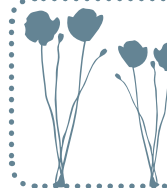
Other events

We've also been to schools, libraries and community events, and welcomed people to natural art workshops, hedgelaying courses, wildlife discovery walks, dragonfly safaris, reptile rambles and a wide range of birdwatching events, including the very popular bird-ringing demos.



L-R: Face painting © Nicky Hoar, Wildlife Gardening Workshop at BNSS © Ian Julian, Lytchett Bay bird ringing demo © Nicky Hoar.

GREENSPACES



Wildlife gardening advice given to 29 schools, businesses, charities and community groups.

© Katie Wilkinson



ALDERNEY WEST

With guidance from Katie, the residents of Alderney West jointly with Poole Housing Partnership gained £1500 of funding from 'Grow Wild' in two consecutive years. Together we were able to create a colourful wildflower meadow.

This long-term shelter for homeless people was given advice about its garden in 2014. Many improvements followed, and the residents' hard work earned them First Place in the community category of the 2017 DWT wildlife gardening competition. The turnaround of this area from drab, neglected patch of grass to thriving wildlife garden - hedgehogs and all - is astonishing!



MICHAEL HOUSE

© Mark Horsford

© Anna Frizzell



RNLI

After a visit from Katie, Anna (Sustainability Manager) planted wildlife friendly plants on the verges at the RNLI HQ in Poole.

CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS

392

volunteering events



19,104

volunteer hours contributed!



A main aim of The Great Heath (TGH) project was to restore and reconnect habitats for both people to enjoy and wildlife to thrive in.

The partnership had an army of volunteers who helped on a variety of tasks to get these sites ship-shape. This included clearing dense jungles of Rhododendron, cutting swathes of silver birch, pine and gorse from heathlands, clearing ditches, building bridges and boardwalks and erecting our brand new signs.

A new TGH Wednesday work party group was started to help with this mammoth task. The TGH Volunteers roamed between different locations every week helping project partners manage their sites and making a huge difference to the habitats that they visited.

The Urban Wildlife Volunteers, Urban Weekenders and Richmond Fellowship also contributed many hours to restoring and managing these beautiful habitats. A fantastic effort and certainly an amazing achievement by all!

Top & bottom © Jack Bedford, Middle © Amy Brocklehurst

KEY VOLUNTEERS

JANE TAYLOR



Wildlife gardening expert! Helped to administer the wildlife gardening plaque scheme, created two new community gardening leaflets and is an annual wildlife gardening competition judge.

The Great Heath team was bolstered by some key volunteers who went above and beyond to help the project.

LINDA BUNTING

Events and talks extraordinaire! Helped to deliver numerous events and talks to the local community, often at weekends.



MIKE & SUE SMITH

All-round reliable

volunteers!

Stalwarts of the Thursday work party and did a HUGE amount of work on the Castleman Trailway, mapping all the new and improved signage funded through TGH.

ANN PHILLIPS



Species of the Month star! Did lots of work to improve the back office records of SotM. Also does the super monthly SotM e-news.

ALISON COPLAND



Communications champ! Delivered the Great HeathWatch e-news to your inboxes with expert attention to detail over the course of the project and beyond.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

We have been blown away by the enthusiasm of young trainees and students from colleges, schools or on placements with us. Other young people have volunteered for The Green Team in the summer holidays. All of them have got stuck in to making a difference for nature, with practical conservation tasks, events, wildlife surveys, promotion, wildlife gardening, fundraising, raising awareness, the list goes on... The students ranged from conservation specialists to those who have faced barriers to learning, and it has been a privilege to learn with them and to see the enjoyment and discovery during their time with us.

1192 STUDENTS
have contributed to
The Great Heath
project



Beaucroft School
Bournemouth University
Bournemouth & Poole
College
Corfe Hills School
Exeter College
Kingston Maurward
College
Poole Grammar School
The Bourne Academy
The Quay School



"We had fun and [a] hilarious time together... gathering round the fire and we roasted marshmallow together - that's my favourite part of the day."
Student from the Pre-Vocational Programmes Course, Bournemouth and Poole College

Clockwise from top left: The Green Team on Upton Heath © The Green Team, students from B&P College loved doing practical conservation and students from The Quay School worked to restore heathland © Nicky Hoar.

WILDLIFE CHAMPIONS



43 people stayed in the scheme for the whole of the year.

26 completed the course to become an official DWT Wildlife Champion!

17 completed up to 5 units.

3 also became DWT Skills for the Future trainees.

The Wildlife Champions scheme aimed to teach anyone over the age of 16 about wildlife and conservation through AQA* 'units'. The units consisted of a wide range of topics from butterfly identification to marine conservation and creating wildlife ponds to woodland management. They were taught in-house by experienced and qualified DWT staff who got to skill-share and pass on their experience to a group of highly enthusiastic and dedicated people!

A record number of people completed the scheme and we hope that they will work within their community helping to promote and enthuse others in caring for Dorset's wildlife.

*AQAs are nationally recognised accreditations



All photos © Katie Wilkinson except main image © Steve Davis.

FOREST SCHOOLS

Sally and Katie were both trained in Forest School level 3, and led groups of primary age children outside in a woodland environment.

Teachers noticed an improvement in confidence and behaviour from a number of their pupils after going through the six-week programme, and most importantly lots of fun was had by all - not least by the leaders!

"I play on my iPad a lot but it's nice to get out into the real world... I want to be an ecologist when I grow up." Isabel

Forest School-esque events also proved popular with families. Many of these were held at Upton Country Park which gave the perfect setting to have some fun in a woodland. Many families came back time and again.

60 CHILDREN
with special educational needs or behavioural issues engaged.



Photos © Katie Wilkinson

WILDLIFE RECORDING

Species of the Month was launched in January 2015. So far we have had **4000** records for **32 different species**, helping to boost the **Dorset Environmental Records Centre**.

Pics L-R: Jack Bedford, Ken Dolbear MBE, Stewart Canham.

In 2016 we held **15 survey workshops** designed to help people identify wildlife including reptiles, bats, birds, dragonflies, moths and plants.

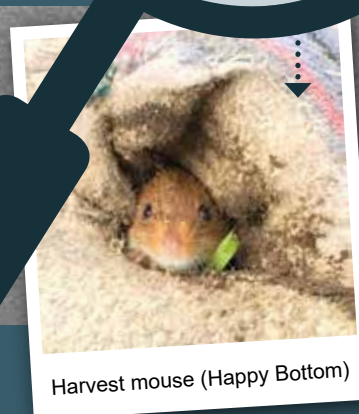


© Katie Wilkinson



18 survey volunteers helped gather records from sites across the The Great Heath, including **Ferndown Common** and **Parley Common**. Some TGH sites did not previously have public access, so any records from these were a "first" for us, including:

As part of TGH, we worked with partners and Adrian Bicker to develop the mapping abilities of their sites on **Living Record** - a wildlife recording website. So far **approx 23,000** records have been entered in Living Record for **2,330 species** across the TGH area. www.livingrecord.net



Harvest mouse (Happy Bottom)



Yellow loosestrife (Lyttchett Bay after 70 years unrecorded)



Water vole (Lyttchett Bay)

WILDLIFE GARDENING PLAQUES

The wildlife friendly gardening plaque scheme was promoted during the project to welcome wildlife to gardens across The Great Heath Living Landscape, including businesses and community groups.

The map opposite shows the spread of some of these plaques (shown by this symbol ★) and how the areas form vital stepping stones across the landscape, linking Purbeck to the New Forest, giving wildlife a friendly space in which to feed and shelter in between nature reserves.

To earn a plaque, the applicant has to show evidence of having at least 6 features from a list of 18 that we provide. They also have to have at least 1 feature from each box as seen below. Free wildlife gardening leaflets are available for individuals and community spaces.

FEATURES

HABITATS

- Wildlife pond
- Permanently damp area/bog garden
- Bird baths at various heights
- Bird box
- Bat box
- Bee homes/insect box

PLANTING

- Nectar rich flower border
- Climbing plants suitable for nesting & feeding
- Wildflower meadow or nectar rich lawn >2m sq
- Shrubby with berries
- Mixed native hedge
- Native tree

MANAGEMENT

- Compost heap
- Log pile or decaying tree stump
- Leaf mould/liquid food made on site
- Human no-go area >2m sq
- No slug pellets
- Long grass area



109 GARDENS awarded a plaque in The Great Heath.



© Crown copyright and database right 2013 Ordnance Survey 29185. Contains Ordnance Survey data.

WAKING UP THE SLEEPING BEAUTY HEATH

An army of community volunteers, working with DWT and Borough of Poole, went into battle against the impenetrable jungle of invasive Rhododendron at Arrowsmith Coppice in 2014.

It was hoped that dormant heather seeds could have survived over the years, but staff were stunned, on visiting the site two summers later, to see heather already in flower a year earlier than predicted and despite the seeds being completely buried by the toxic Rhododendron.

The work continues, but there is definitely light at the end of the tunnel.

Surrounded by Canford and Dunyeats Heaths, Arrowsmith Coppice is a precious piece in the jigsaw of The Great Heath, now well on its way to full recovery.

Thank you to all the volunteers who were part of this fabulous success story!



Photos top - bottom © Jez Martin, Nicky Hoar, Andy Fale.

EXPLORE THE GREAT HEATH



© Nicky Hoar

To help people discover and enjoy their next-door nature, we have lots of information on The Great Heath website about where to go, what to see, and how to get there.

.....▶ THEGREATHEATH.ORG

We have also published a downloadable guide called "Walking in The Great Heath", which covers everything from a 5-minute stroll to a 64-mile hike following one of The Great Heath's waymarked trails or circular routes.



Our Corfe Barrows Nature Park leaflet (also available to download) opens up a wild world of woods, meadows and heathland with linking trails for walkers and cyclists, including suggested routes, a map and new accessibility gradings.

Visit thegreatheath.org to print your copy or find out more about The Great Heath.

FEEDBACK

"Wow, thank you so much for sharing your knowledge of nightjars and especially for arranging the double circuit flight... bats and glow worms as well!"

Jo Grierson

"Today, for the first time since I could walk any distance, which was several years ago, I enjoyed relaxing on the river bank near Canford Bottom."

Ian Bennett

"Given me confidence to help with [the] Churchyard hedge ready to lay this winter."

Participant on Hedge-Laying Workshop

"We had an absolutely brilliant day!"

Lauren Colley, Siemens

"You really have opened up the countryside for us all to enjoy."

Ferndown resident

"The new fingerposts and waymarkers are spot on!"

Friends of Cannon Hill Woodlands

"A real turning of the tide for Dorset Heathland. So much special wildlife protected and so many people inspired!"

Lesley Haskins, The Erica Trust

"It made me look for opportunities to get closer to the nature."

Wildlife Gardening Workshop participant

WHAT NEXT?



© Jez Martin

The Great Heath has been hailed a national exemplar project by the Heritage Lottery Fund. It was unique in that what we set out to achieve was across a densely populated urban area.

By working together with many different organisations, communities and individuals, we have enhanced the profile of this area and galvanised more people to get out and learn about, conserve and enjoy their local environment.

The HLF has given us the opportunity to build on this success through the concept of Nature Parks. We now have three, and project officers are still working hard to promote, improve and conserve these areas for local communities.

Check out our dedicated webpage thegreatheath.org for more information about where and when you can find us next! Or follow [@dorsetwildlife](https://twitter.com/dorsetwildlife) on Twitter or Facebook.

There are so many ways to get involved - so don't be shy, get in touch - we would love to hear from you!





The Great Heath Living Landscape is a partnership project led by Dorset Wildlife Trust and includes:



Edited: Nicky Hoar, Katie Wilkinson & Alison Copland | **Design:** Errin Skingsley

Main front cover image: Upton Heath © Tony Bates MBE.
 Other front cover images L-R © Nicky Hoar, Stewart Canham, Nicky Hoar, Ian Julian, Nicky Hoar.
 Back cover image: Nicky Hoar.