

Whitmoor Common SPA:

EC Directive 79/409 on the Conservation of Wild Birds Special Protection Area (SPA)

Name: Thames Basin Heaths

Unitary Authority/County: Bracknell Forest; Hampshire; Surrey; Windsor and Maidenhead.

Site description: The Thames Basin Heaths SPA is a composite site that is located across the counties of Surrey, Hampshire and Berkshire in southern England. It encompasses all or parts of Ash to Brookwood Heaths Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Bourley and Long Valley SSSI, Bramshill SSSI, Broadmoor to Bagshot Woods and Heaths SSSI, Castle Bottom to Yateley and Hawley Commons SSSI, Chobham Common SSSI, Colony Bog and Bagshot Heaths SSSI, Eelmoor Marsh SSSI, Hazeley Heath SSSI, Horsell Common SSSI, Ockham and Wisley Commons SSSI, Sandhurst to Owlsmoor Bogs and Heaths SSSI and Whitmoor Common SSSI.

The open heathland habitats overlie sand and gravel sediments which give rise to sandy or peaty acidic soils, supporting dry heathy vegetation on well-drained slopes, wet heath on low-lying shallow slopes and bogs in valleys. The site consists of tracts of heathland, scrub and woodland, once almost continuous, but now fragmented into separate blocks by roads, urban development and farmland. Less open habitats of scrub, acidic woodland and conifer plantations dominate, within which are scattered areas of open heath and mire. The site supports important breeding populations of a number of birds of lowland heathland, especially nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* and woodlark *Lullula arborea*, both of which nest on the ground, often at the woodland/heathland edge, and Dartford warbler *Sylvia undata*, which often nests in gorse *Ulex* sp. Scattered trees and scrub are used for roosting.

Together with the nearby Ashdown Forest and Wealden Heaths SPAs, the Thames Basin Heaths form part of a complex of heathlands in southern England that support important breeding bird populations.

Size of SPA: The SPA covers an area of 8274.72 ha.

Qualifying species:

The site qualifies under article 4.1 of the Directive (79/409/EEC) as it is used regularly by 1% or more of the Great Britain populations of the following species listed in Annex I in any season:

Annex I species	Count and season	Period	% of GB population
Nightjar <i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>	264 churring males – breeding	1998/99	7.8%
Woodlark <i>Lullula arborea</i>	149 pairs – breeding	1997	9.9%
Dartford warbler <i>Sylvia undata</i>	445 pairs – breeding	1999	27.8%

Non-qualifying species of interest: Hen harrier *Circus cyaneus*, merlin *Falco columbarius*, short-eared owl *Asio flammeus* and kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* (all Annex I species) occur in non-breeding numbers of less than European importance (less than 1% of the GB population).

Status of SPA:

Thames Basin Heaths was classified as a Special Protection Area on 9 March 2005.

This citation/map relates to a site entered in the Register of European sites for Great Britain.
Register reference number... <u>UK</u>
Date of registration... <u>9 MARCH 2005</u>
Signed... <u>[Signature]</u>
On behalf of the Secretary of State for Environment Food and Rural Affairs

COUNTY: SURREY SITE NAME: WHITMOOR COMMON
DISTRICT: GUILDFORD, WOKING
Status: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Local Planning Authority: GUILDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL, WOKING BOROUGH COUNCIL

National Grid Ref: SU 985 535	Area: 164.1 ha, 405.3 acres
Ordnance Survey Sheets 1:50,000: 186	1:10,000: SU 95 SE
Date notified (under 1949 Act): 1955	Date of last revision: 1975
Date notified (under 1981 Act): 1985	Date of last revision: 1993

Other Information: This site forms part of Thames Basin Heaths proposed Special Protection Area for Birds (pSPA), proposed for designation under the European Commission Directive 79/409 on the Conservation of Wild Birds (the Birds Directive). It is managed as a public open space by Surrey County Council.

Reasons for Notification

Whitmoor Common is an extensive area of London Basin heathland characteristic of the soils of the Bagshot and Bracklesham Beds. The site contains a range of heathland habitats, as well as areas of woodland, grassland, and both standing and running water. A mosaic of wet heath and acidic grassland dominates the open areas. There is also an extensive area of dry heath as well as smaller stands of bracken and neutral grassland. Approximately half the site is covered with woodland, which varies in its age and composition. This site is the location of a rare spider, a scarce beetle, and two plants which occur only rarely in Surrey. It supports many characteristic heathland birds, including a strong breeding population of nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*, a bird listed on Annex 1 of the Birds Directive.

Heathland

The drier areas of heath in the south and east are dominated by heather *Calluna vulgaris*, with bell heather *Erica cinerea*, dwarf gorse *Ulex minor*, wavy hair-grass *Deschampsia flexuosa* and common bent grass *Agrostis tenuis*. To the north west, impeded drainage has given rise to wet heath and acidic grassland communities consisting of heather, cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix*, purple moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*, tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa* and the moss *Polytrichum commune*. Boggy depressions which occur within the area of wet heath are dominated by *Sphagnum* moss. Several characteristic plants occur in the areas of wet heath. These include bog asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum*, bog pimpernel *Anagallis tenella*, round-leaved sundew *Drosera rotundifolia*, white beak-sedge *Rhynchospora alba*, and marsh club-moss *Lycopodiella inundata*. The marsh gentian *Gentiana pneumonanthe*, which has only one other location in Surrey, is also found in association with the wet heath community. In addition the areas of wet heath support several bryophytes (liverworts and mosses), amongst them *Calliergon cordifolium*, *Campylopus brevipilus*, *Riccia fluitans*, *Gladopodiella francisci* and *Hypnum imponens*. Scattered throughout the heathland is a scrub of gorse *Ulex europaeus*, broom *Sarothamnus scoparius* and birch *Betula* spp. A nationally scarce spider, *Oxyopes heterophthalmus* and a nationally scarce beetle *Hyperaspis pseudopustulata* also occur in the heathland areas.

Grassland

An area of short, dry grassland in the northern part of the Common supports a number of interesting and localised plants, including sheep's-bit *Jasione montana*, sand spurrey *Spergularia rubra*, little mouse-ear *Cerastium semidecandrum*, early hair-grass *Aira praecox* and silvery hair-grass *A. caryophyllea*.

Woodland

Birch and pedunculate oak *Quercus robur* form the major woodlands, and there are also several stand of mature Scots pine *Pinus sylvestris*. The majority of the woodland is of recent origin, and has colonised areas which were formerly open heath. On poorly drained areas downy birch *B. pubescens*, tends to be dominant, whilst on drier ground silver birch, *B. pendula* predominates. The more establish woodlands are dominated by pedunculate oak which occurs together with both species of birch, hazel *Corylus avellans*, sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* and Scots pine. In the extreme west of the site there is a swamp of mature alder *Alnus glutinosa* and crack willow *Salix fragilis*, whilst grey willow *Salix cinerea* occurs in wet areas around the ponds and stream.

Water

The water areas at Whitmoor Common, totalling 3.6 hectares, include two ponds and several streams. Many unusual species have been recorded at Brittens pond (SU 990 531) including orange foxtail *Alopecurus aequalis*, many stalked spike rush *Eleocharis multicaulis*, bog stitchwort, *Stellaria alsine*, tubular water dropwort *Oenanthe fistulosa* and horned pondweed *Zannichellia palustris*. Although the populations of these plants have declined as a result of clearance of reedmace *Typha latifolia* in 1971, recovery is highly likely given suitable management. The other pond (SU 983 539) is dominated by a tall fen vegetation of rushes *Juncus* spp., reedmace and sallow scrub. The streams contain pond water-crowfoot *Ranunculus peltatus* and contribute to the wetland communities at times of flooding.

Birds

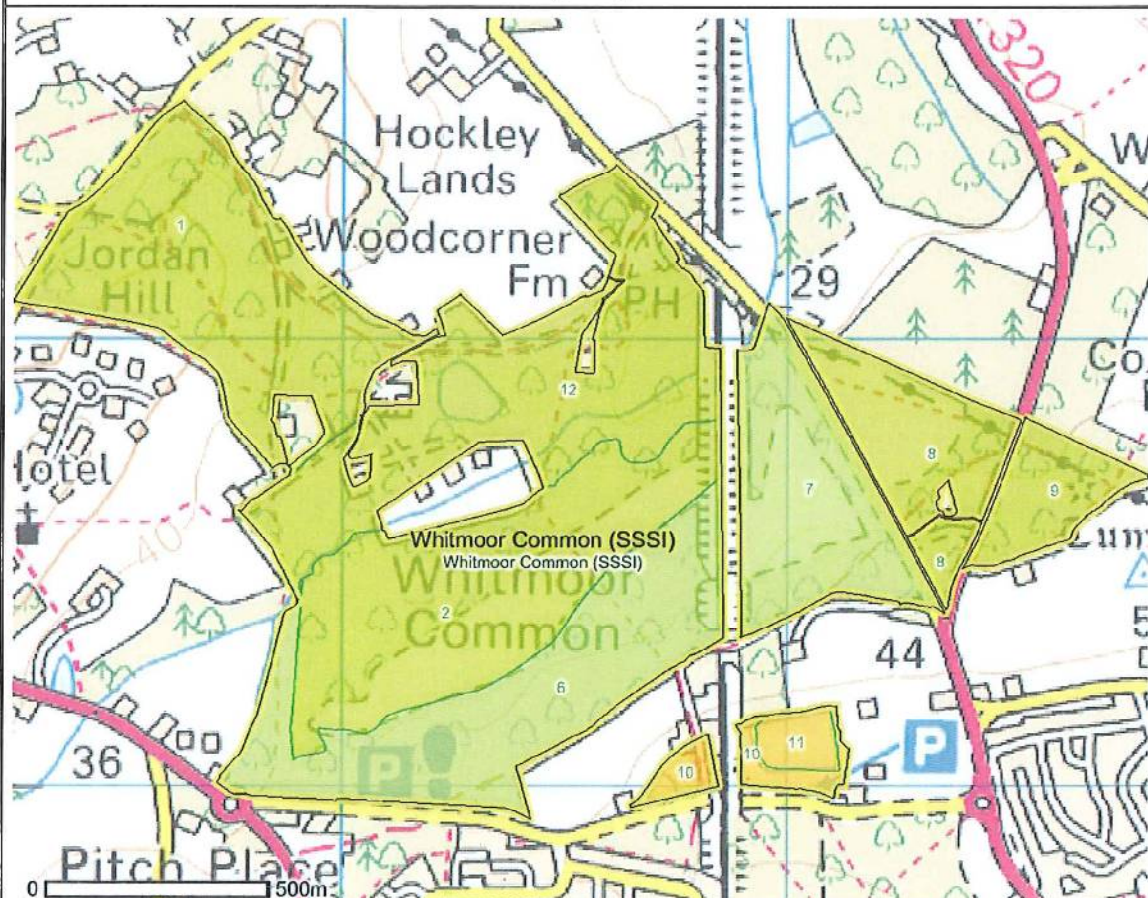
The diverse habitats within the site, particularly the open heath and scrub, provide ideal breeding areas for characteristic heathland bird species. Among these are nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*, woodlark *Lullula arborea* and stonechat *Saxicola torquata*.

Whitmoor Common forms part of Thames Basin Heaths pSPA, which consists of a group of heathlands extending from Wisley in Surrey to Tadley in Hampshire and Bracknell in Berkshire, supporting nationally important populations of a number of bird species. These include nightjar and woodlark, both listed on Annex 1 of the Birds Directive as being rare and in need of protection. Thames Basin Heaths pSPA, taken as a whole, supports an estimated 9.2 and 29.4% respectively of the British breeding populations of nightjar and woodlark.



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