

Maps not drawn to scale.

### Countryside Code:

- Be Safe – plan ahead & follow any signs
- Leave gates & property as you find them
- Protect plants & animals, & take your litter home
- Keep dogs under control
- Consider other people



### Welcome to Upton Heath

There are 4 recommended routes across Upton Heath. The route marked in yellow on the map is an easy access route. Details of this route are available in a separate leaflet - Upton Heath Nature Trail Guide - Easy Access Trail.

All trails have waymarkers, so look out for wooden posts with metal plaques and coloured disks to ensure you follow the correct paths. Suitable clothing and footwear should be worn for the terrain.

We ask all dog owners to help to protect rare heathland birds during the nesting season (1<sup>st</sup> March-31<sup>st</sup> July) by keeping their animals under close control when out on the heath. Please clean up after your dog – bins are provided.

- **If you see a fire, no matter how small, phone 999 immediately.**
- **Beware of ticks, especially in long grass, bracken and scrub. Please dress appropriately.**

# Upton Heath Nature Reserve Trail Guide



### Route 1 - Warbler

Length: 3km 1.8 miles  
Time: 1 - 1.5 hours

This trail will take you on sandy and clay surfaces and some uneven and steep ground which can be difficult when wet. Start route from Beacon Road, Pinesprings Drive, Broadstone BH18 9JP SY989951



### Route 2 - Lizard

Length: 2.3km 1.4 miles  
Time: About 1 hour

The terrain on this trail is easier to manage under foot but can get muddy when wet. Start route from the lay-by on the corner of Longmeadow Lane and Beechbank Avenue. Limited parking available. SY993941



### Route 3 - Dragonfly

Length: 5.25km 3.3 miles  
Time: About 2 hours

This trail will take you on sandy and clay surfaces and some uneven ground which can be difficult when wet. Start route from the Urban Wildlife Centre, Beacon Hill Lane, Corfe Mullen, BH21 3RX. Limited parking available. SY978950



Part of The Great Heath, a partnership of voluntary organisations, local authorities, businesses and communities working together to create a living landscape in which both people and wildlife can prosper. [thegreatheath.org](http://thegreatheath.org)

For further information about volunteering please contact **Dorset Wildlife Trust Urban Wildlife Centre** Beacon Hill Lane, Corfe Mullen Wimborne, Dorset BH21 3RX 01202 692033 [urban@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk](mailto:urban@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk) [www.dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk](http://www.dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk)

Front cover photos © Colin Varnell.  
Map © Mike Roberts.



Part of a nationwide network of Wildlife Trusts

## Interesting Facts

The origin of the Roman road, which runs along the eastern side of the site, can be traced back to AD 43. It was constructed after the Roman invasion by Vespasian's Second Augusta Legion. The road originally ran from a port at Hamworthy, north to a fortress near Wimborne.

Also found on site is the old Dorchester to Southampton railway line, some of which is now part of the Castleman Trailway. This is open to walkers, cyclists and horse riders (in areas). The railway originally opened in 1847 and this section was closed and the track removed in the 1960s,

Dorset heaths are of European importance and are the best examples of lowland heath in Britain. Heathland is not actually natural but was created through the clearance of the natural wildwood and its subsequent use by people over the last 4000 years.

2000 years ago heathland stretched from Dorchester to Christchurch, covering 40,000ha. The remaining 7000ha of fragmented heathland requires careful management to secure its survival.

Upton Heath contains all 6 of the UK native species of reptile: adder, smooth snake, grass snake, sand lizard, common lizard and slow worm. It is also a safe haven for many rare birds including the stonechat, hobby, Dartford warbler and nightjar.

From several parts of Upton Heath you can see and hear the Beacon Hill landfill site, operated by SITA. Gravel, sand and clay have been quarried here since around 1800. The Beacon Hill Brick Co Ltd extracted sand from the site between 1937 and 2001, but is now working with SITA to restore the site to heathland. Both organisations support the Dorset Wildlife Trust.

The extraction of aggregates (sand, gravel and crushed rock) from the environment has enabled the development of our urban areas - from housing to roads and industrial areas. Natural regeneration and careful restoration of quarried areas across the country is encouraging the return of wildlife and creating new areas for recreation.

## Upton Heath Route 1

**1** Start at the entrance to Upton Heath at the end of Beacon Road. Take a left at the entrance taking the main track, where you will find the DWT notice board. Continue straight along the main track until you reach the view point from where you can see the Purbecks, Brownsea Island and Poole.

**2** 200 years ago, the whole area in view would have been heathland (apart from the Purbecks!) but due to the building of roads, housing and industry (urbanisation), and with increased forestry and farming, the landscape has changed to what you see today. From the viewpoint, take the path leading to the steps on your left.

**3** Heading down the steps, you will see how the land has to be managed to prevent erosion of the sandy soils. Bear right, being careful of any exposed roots. Walk straight on through the silver birch copse.

**4** From here you can see the changes in vegetation which reflect the changing conditions of the soil, from dry on higher ground to humid and wet in lower areas. Continue on the path.

**5** Through the bridle gate turn right onto the Roman road. On your left you will pass Pinesprings Local Nature Reserve which is predominately grassland and covers 7ha between Upton Heath and residential areas. Walking through the trees you can see how the heathland would look if unmanaged. In these wooded areas you may spot birds often seen in gardens such as finches and tits.

**6** Continue straight on, keeping to the main track through the metal gates. Continue along this track for about 350m until you reach a redundant railway bridge.

**7** Once under the bridge, take a left to the top of the slope and the old railway line.



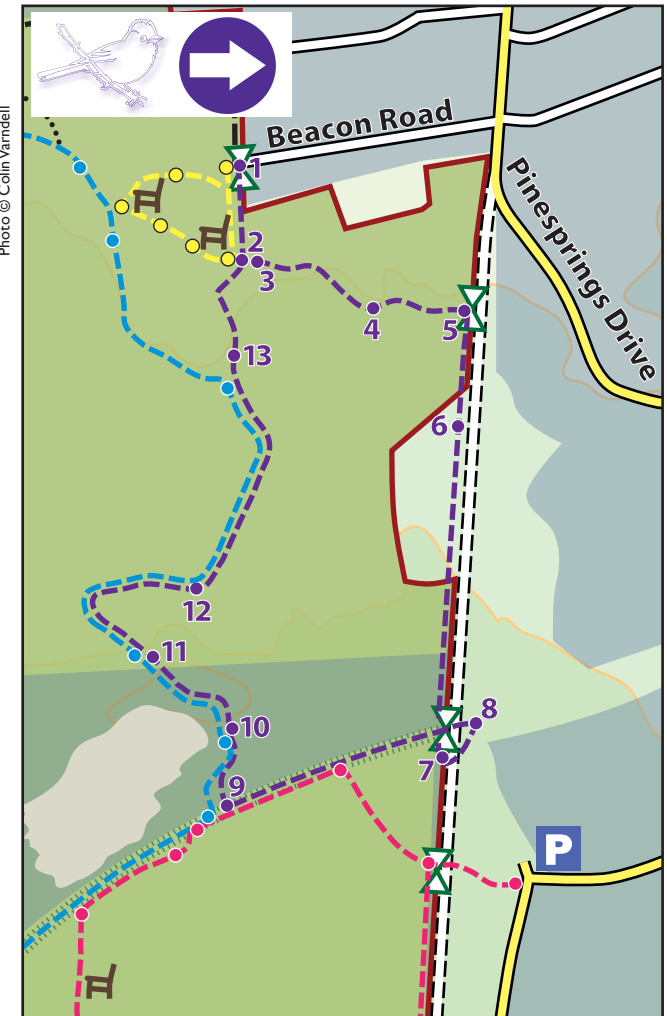
Photo © Colin Vamdell

**8** Turn left and join the path that travels along the old railway line. Due to being a raised route, this path offers excellent opportunities to see wildlife. Look out across the area on your left where you might see Exmoor ponies busy munching down the invasive trees and shrub plants. This keeps the area open so the heathers can grow which in turn provides a home for the rare smooth snake and sand lizard. Dartford warblers and stonechats can also be seen and heard here.

**9** Turn right before you reach the derelict plate-layers hut, a relic of the dismantled railway. Here is the quarry where large deposits of clay and sand were extracted, which gave rise to the local pottery and brick-making industries. Eventually, this resulted in many ponds being formed, creating habitats for newts and dragonflies.

**10** Carry straight on past the small ponds. Here you may see many dragonfly species such as the golden-ringed dragonfly, broad-bodied chaser, common darter or even the largest heathland dragonfly, the emperor. Follow the main path.

**11** To the left, is an area of wet heath that has marsh gentians in flower in late summer. The scattered trees around you are good for goldcrests. Take the track up the hill and bear right down the slope.



**12** Walk up the hill following the track. This is a wildlife hotspot so watch out for the Dartford warblers and, during the long summer evenings, the nightjars which nest in the surrounding heather. While walking on this track you will notice the change in habitat from wet heath to dry heath, corresponding with the change in soil from clay to sand.

**13** Walk up the slope taking the main track. At the top, take the track on your right which will take you back to the viewpoint and the benches. Upton Heath was considered a waste ground but now is a valuable SSSI site and acts as a green lung to Poole and Hamworthy. From the viewpoint, retrace your steps to Beacon Road.



## Upton Heath Route 2

**1** Walk through the kissing gate straight up the stone path where you are surrounded by birch trees and sweet chestnut coppices. Here you may find birds such as finches and tits. Upton Heath is just ahead of you.

**2** Slightly to your right across the Roman road through the bridlegate, you will see the Dorset Wildlife Trust's information board. Continue up the slope ahead of you, passing the information board. As you reach the brow of the hill, the track opens out to reveal views across the heath.

**3** Turn left onto the old railway line and continue along it. To your left you will see an example of wet heathland where you will see dragonflies over the pools such as the golden-ringed dragonfly, broad-bodied chaser, common darter or even the largest heathland dragonfly, the emperor. In June, look out for the striking yellow of the bog asphodel in flower.

**4** Take the first left off the old railway line, just past the derelict plate-layers hut (a relic of the dismantled railway), passing through the bridge gate and into the grazing unit. You will find signs of Exmoor ponies in this enclosure, which Dorset Wildlife Trust use as one of its main long term management techniques on the heathland. The animals graze the grasses and saplings, helping to restrict unwelcome shrub and tree growth. Please remember these animals are semi-wild so we ask that you don't feed them, especially as some foods can make them ill.



**5** Bear right on the track, which runs parallel with the old railway line. In the past, sand and clay were extracted from this part of the site and the railway line once transported these raw materials to the potteries and factories, after the passenger line was closed. Stay on the path, which soon opens out to become a fire break. Fire breaks are created by the Dorset Wildlife Trust by cutting all the vegetation to the ground to help reduce the spread of a fire and to manage the heather. Continue along this break, so you are parallel to the railway line.

**6** At the end of the fire break continue left through the birch trees on a small path, where several local schools and volunteer groups help with the management of the heathland on a regular basis. These groups remove scrub and bracken to allow the heather and gorse to rejuvenate. If birch and pine were allowed to grow, the area would revert to woodland such as you see around you.

**7** Along this track you will come to some boardwalks. Watch out for basking lizards. You will see to your left a platform that is used for management vehicles to gain access across the boggy ground. The wet heathland you can see around you is important for the insectivorous sundews, bog asphodel and home to the raft spider. Carry along the main track where you can clearly see the changes in the heathland habitat from wet heath to dry heath. This is as a result of the changes in soil from clays to free draining sands.



Bog asphodel

Photo © Andy Fale



Golden-ringed dragonfly

Photo © Ken Dolbear

**8** Pass through the kissing gate and turn left onto the track that leads to the Roman road. Keep to the right of the track through the trees as this area gets very boggy.

**9** As you cross the stream the road bears to the left and you are now back on the Roman road. Look out for and listen for numerous woodland birds such as nuthatch, greater-spotted woodpecker and long-tailed tit. Follow the Roman road north until you are back at post 2. From here turn right, back on the stone track and to the kissing gate onto the Longmeadow Lane lay-by.

## Upton Heath Route 3

This route starts from the Urban Wildlife Centre, home to the Dorset Wildlife Trust's Urban Programme and the Urban Heaths Partnership.

You start the walk by going straight down the bridleway in front of the workshops. The willow trees lining the bridleway are full of feeding birds and the track is crossed by animal runs leading from the open pasture on the right to the open heath to the left.



Marsh gentian

Photo © Tony Bates

**1** Once the track opens up to the heath, take the first little track on the left. The view over Upton Heath is impressive. You can see most of the wet heath/valley mire which is circumnavigated by this walk. The expanse of heath before you is the second largest in the conurbation of Poole and is a precious refuge for all local wildlife as well as the rare heathland species. Habitat management of this area includes grazing by rare breed cattle, enhancing the diversity of heather swards, man made scrapes for reptiles and invertebrates and mown fire breaks for age variation in the vegetation.

**2** Turn right and then the first left. This path takes you into open heathland. Grasses in the heather indicate changes in the soil and provide variety. This area is great for ground nesting birds such as nightjars and meadow pipits, and for smooth snakes and adders.

**3** At the fork go right then follow the arrows so you descend a steep narrow path which ends up running alongside a small willow woodland.

**4** Follow the path right through the wood back up a steep slope the other side. Along this path are wooden boardwalks. If you approach them slowly and quietly you might see a common lizard basking.

**5** Let the tall grasses tickle your face and look out for rushes by the path edges and out in the heath. Bear right, keeping the landfill site to your left and open heath to your right. Listen for numerous gulls calling overhead, and look out for ravens that have made Upton Heath their home.

**6** On a summers day, many insects can be seen flying about; watch out for the grayling butterfly and different types of solitary bees.

**7** Continue along this path over the boardwalks, following the base of the slopes.

**8** At the end of the path you will come to a T junction. Turn right, keeping to the base of the slope. From this path you can clearly see again the change in the heathland habitat from dry heath on the left to humid heath, wet heath and the valley mire on the right. This is due to the changes in soil in the slope - from sandy and free draining at the top to clays at the bottom. Each heathland 'zone' seen has different plant communities. Dry heath comprises of ling and bell heather; humid heath is dominated by ling and cross-leaved heath and wet heath by cross-leaved heath.



Grayling

Photo © Stewart

**9** Stay on this path, hugging the base of the steep slope, past the paths on the left and finally you will reach a main sandy track

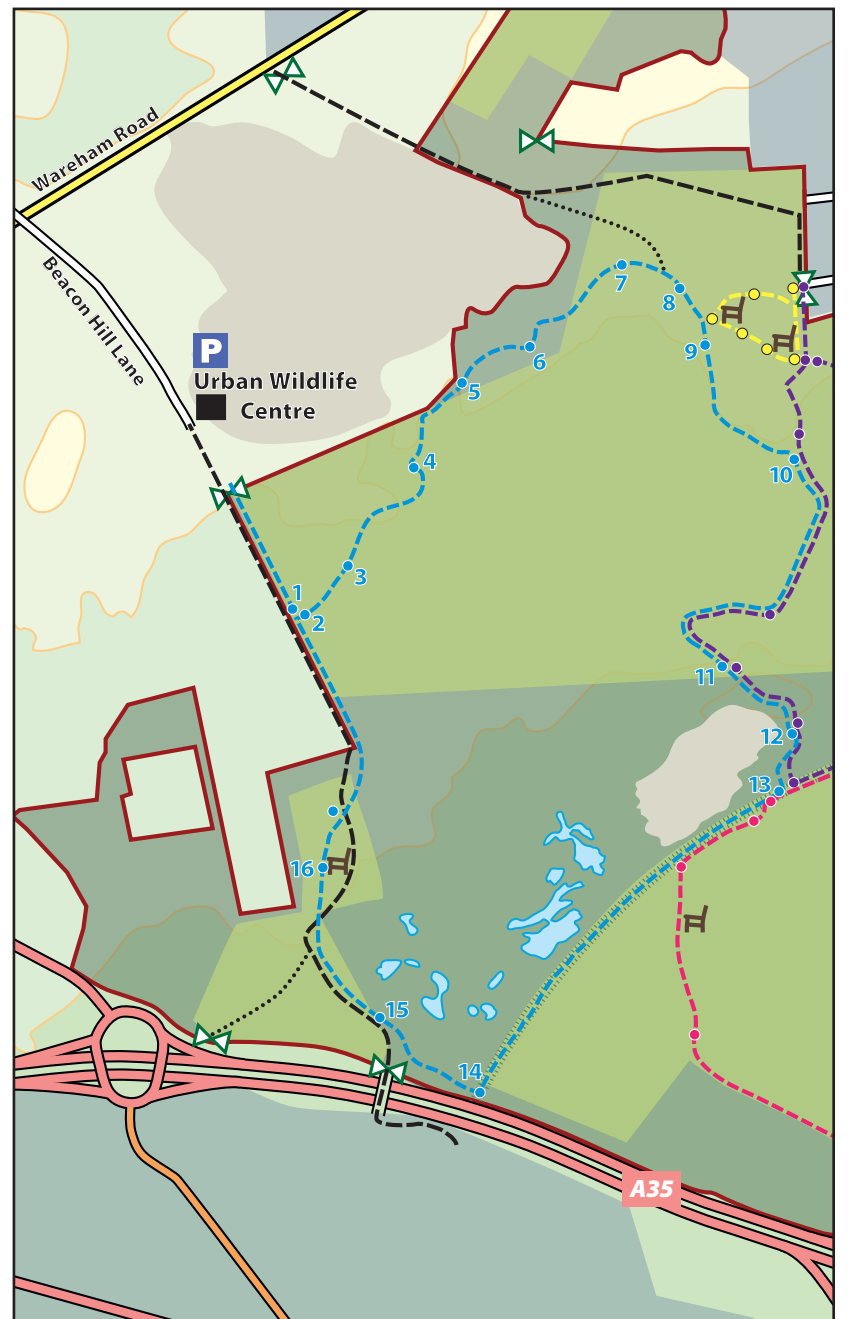
**10** Turn right on the main track. You are now surrounded by gentle undulations in the terrain and a patchwork of heathland habitats which is very impressive. Follow the path under the pylons and cables, keeping your ears and eyes open for Dartford warblers which are often seen in this area. Go up the slope and bear left and then down the other side.

**11** To the right, is an area of wet heath which has marsh gentians in flower in summer and the scattered trees around you are good for goldcrests. At the fork in the path take the left track hugging the base of the slope.

**12** Continue straight on and you will come across a small pond to the left of the path. Stop and observe the wonderful aerobatics of the dragonflies in summer. To the right is the old quarries area. Continue on and the old railway line is now visible ahead of you.

**13** Turn right so the old quarried area is to your right. Follow the old railway line looking out for the livestock, busy munching down the invasive trees and scrub plants so the heathers can grow which in turn provide homes for smooth snakes and sand lizards. Dartford warblers and stonechats can also be seen and heard along here. Depending on the season, common birds are numerous, as well as berries, fungi, flowers and insects. Keep your eyes and ears open!

**14** At the end of the railway line turn right and follow the main thoroughfare with the A35 on your left and ascend the tarmac slope. Continue down the other side, keeping the dual carriageway on your left.



**15** Follow the path keeping to the base of the sandy slopes and at the T junction turn right up the hill. Watch out again for the activities of burrowing bees and parasitic wasps in the banks of the paths. At the top of the hill take a rest and look around you. Out across the valley it is teeming with insect life and flush with rare plants such as bog asphodel, marsh gentian and orchids. Look out for deer and large birds.

**16** Take the path down the slope and aim for the corner of the field which will bring you back onto the bridleway, listen and look for finches feeding in the trees, meadow pipits in the sky and the heathland grayling butterfly which turns its tail to the sun to create a minimum shadow on the sandy soil they rest on. Continue on the track which will take you all the way back to the Urban Wildlife Centre.