

UK's first 'super' National Nature Reserve created on Purbeck Heaths

With the increasing need for a bigger, better and more joined-up approach to nature conservation, seven leading partners have come together to help protect wildlife by creating the UK's first ever 'super' National Nature Reserve (NNR) on the Purbeck Heaths in Dorset.

The new [Purbeck Heaths](#) NNR 'knits' together 11 types of priority habitat to enable wildlife to move more easily across the landscape. This will give rare and varied wildlife, including the sand lizard, the Dartford warbler, and the silver studded blue butterfly, a better chance of adapting and thriving in light of the current climate crisis.

The new super NNR combines three existing NNRs at Stoborough Heath, Hartland Moor, and Studland and Godlingston Heath linking them with a significant amount of new land including nature reserves and conservation areas managed by seven partners.

It is 3,331 hectares (8,231 acre) in total, expanding the current NNR in Purbeck by 2,335 hectares (5,770 acres). The new designation has resulted in a landscape-scale haven more than three times its original size, and similar in size to the town of Blackpool.

The expansion will create the largest lowland heathland NNR in the country providing tremendous benefits to wildlife by allowing all species the opportunity to move around the landscape more easily. Building resilience into the landscape will help tackle the decline in nature, with [41 per cent of species in decline in Britain since 1970](#).

It will also offer a public benefit by giving people more opportunity to explore and in turn help improve the health and wellbeing of more than 2.5 million people who visit Purbeck every year.

By working together and combining land, expertise and a common vision, the National Trust, Natural England, RSPB, Forestry England, the Rempstone Estate, Dorset Wildlife Trust and Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, along with other landowners and managers, are taking important strides forward in landscape-scale conservation and nature recovery.

This super reserve is a rich mosaic of lowland wet and dry heath, valley mires, acid grassland and woodland, along with coastal sand dunes, lakes and saltmarsh. Conifer plantations are also being carefully restored to heathland.

Natural England Chair Tony Juniper said:

This new super nature reserve is a great example of what can be achieved through partnerships and collaboration. It demonstrates

how by working together we can secure a brighter future for our wonderful natural environment. By creating bigger, better, and more joined-up wild places like this one, we will achieve big benefits for both people and wildlife.

In facing the twin and deepening challenges of global heating and wildlife loss, we need to think and act on a larger scale. Today's move marks a shift in gear and a new era for nature recovery in England. Comparable ambition is visible in other partnerships that are established or forming across the country, not only setting the scene for species recovery, but also increased resilience to climate change.

Defra Environment Minister Rebecca Pow said:

I commend all of the partners coming together to deliver this landmark milestone for wildlife and people – the UK's first super National Nature Reserve. Purbeck Heaths is a trailblazing example of how landscape-scale conservation can help wildlife thrive, improve people's well-being, and build resilience to climate change.

Through our landmark 25 Year Environment Plan we will deliver a greener future, and the collaborative spirit of Purbeck Heaths marks a significant step towards putting our ambitious plans to leave the environment in a better state than we found it into action.

The National Trust, which already had 746 hectares (1,843 acres) of land in the NNR, has designated a further 644 hectares (1,591 acres).

Mark Harold, National Trust Director of Land & Nature, said:

For generations to come, Purbeck Heaths will be at the heart of a healthy, resilient landscape brimming with wildlife. As well as creating a special place for wildlife to recover and move around freely, we hope to inspire people to engage with nature and explore the great outdoors.

All the rare and beautiful wildlife living in and beyond the reserve will benefit hugely from a landscape where habitats are bigger, in better condition and better connected – and where natural processes are restored. Here they will be able to spread and build more resilient populations.

Purbeck Heaths is one of the most biodiverse places in the UK – home to thousands of species of wildlife, including 450 that are listed as rare, threatened or protected. Indeed, Purbeck includes the richest recorded 10km

square for biodiversity in the UK.

All six native reptiles call this reserve home – including endangered smooth snakes and sand lizards. Heathland birds include breeding nightjars, Dartford warblers and woodlarks. And raptors such as hen harriers, marsh harriers, merlins, hobbies and ospreys all find these productive hunting grounds.

At least 12 species of bats live on the NNR. The Purbeck Heaths are some of the last strongholds for many specialist insects and other invertebrates, such as southern damselflies (Britain's rarest dragonfly) and the Purbeck mason wasp. This reserve is also home to Dorset's only colony of small pearl-bordered fritillary butterflies.

Rare plants include marsh gentians, great sundews and lesser butterfly orchids. And there are at least two fungi that are found nowhere else in England and Wales – the sand earthtongue and *Roseodiscus formosus*.

Emma Marsh, Director, RSPB England, said:

The RSPB and its partners in the Purbeck Heaths NNR have been working for decades to restore Purbeck's heathlands and the designation of the Purbeck Heaths super NNR is a fantastic recognition of our collective success.

We're excited about the opportunity to make this an even wilder landscape, where some of our rarest wildlife can find a home. Together we're forging ahead to achieve even more success for both nature and people at a landscape scale.

Further information

- Visit www.dorsetaonb.org.uk/project/wild-purbeck for more information
- Natural England is the government's advisor on the natural environment. Established in 2006, our work is focused on enhancing England's wildlife and landscapes and maximising the benefits they bring to the public.
- The new Purbeck Heath National Nature Reserve is the first super NNR, merging other protected sites to enhance habitat and improve landscape resilience for people and for wildlife.
- England's 222 National Nature Reserves (NNRs) form part of a UK-wide network of nature reserves covering England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Natural England manages 143 of these NNRs to ensure that our finest wildlife and geological sites are protected, conserved and enhanced for present and future generations. These features are of national and often international importance, and many NNRs are important for study and research. From Lindisfarne in Northumberland to The Lizard in Cornwall, and from the Suffolk Coast in East Anglia to the Stiperstones in Shropshire – NNRs are the very best places to experience the natural world at first hand.
- A Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is one of the country's very best wildlife and/or geological sites. There are over 4,100 Sites

of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in England, covering around 8% of the country's land area. Many SSSIs are also National Nature Reserves (NNRs) or Local Nature Reserves (LNRs).