



Humberhead Peatlands

National Nature Reserve



Welcome to Humberhead Peatlands NNR

It's hard to visit the remarkable Humberhead Peatlands NNR in South Yorkshire without feeling you've discovered something a bit special.

The boggy, lowland mire that makes up the reserve is one of the country's rarest and most threatened habitats. Covering 2,887 hectares, Humberhead represents over 5% of the total remaining peatlands in England.

The reserve is made up of Thorne, Goole, Crowle Moors and Hatfield Moors – all remnants of wetland that occupied the floodplain of the Humberhead Levels thousands of years ago.

A mosaic of habitats, including peatland, heath, woodland and gravel pits, has made the area incredibly rich in wildlife. The reserve supports over 5,000 species of plants and animals, of which more than 4,000 are insects – many of these are scooped up by one of the reserve's star attractions, the mysterious, nocturnal and very rare nightjar.



A peatlands timeline

About 14,000 years ago

The Ice Age

The area is covered by the shallow waters of the great post-glacial Lake Humber.

10,000–4,000 years ago

Early Pre-history

Ice age glaciers retreat and the first hunter-gatherers move in. The dense woodland they find is home to deer, beaver and predatory wolves.

4,000–2,000 years ago

Bronze and Iron Ages

The deep layer of peat which now covers the area is the result of the clearance of the woodland by prehistoric man. Enhanced by climate change, this led to the gradual formation of boggy, waterlogged conditions about 4,000 years ago.

A Neolithic wooden trackway was found under peat on Hatfield Moors in 2004.

2,000 years ago

Romans

The Romans probably came into the area in the late 70s AD, establishing a major settlement at Doncaster (Danum).

2,000–1,000 years ago

Anglo-Saxon and Viking

A strong Scandinavian presence is evident from place names such as Eastoft and Althorpe. Saxons first settle and name Thorne, Crowle and Hatfield.

1000–1450AD

Middle Ages

Norman overlords establish Hatfield Chase, a 270-square-mile hunting forest including Thorne Moors. The first known map of the area is the Inclesmoor map of c1450.

1450–1700

Tudors and Stuarts

Successive monarchs hunt deer on Hatfield Chase. Dutch engineer Cornelius Vermuyden undertakes the first comprehensive drainage of the area in 1626.

1700–1900

Industrial Revolution and Victorian Britain

Small companies start commercial peat extraction for animal litter in the 1880s. Peat is dug by hand, and transported by narrow-gauge railways to the processing works. A horse drawn barge system is also established on Thorne Moors.

1900–1970

Twentieth Century

The British Moss Litter Company continues the commercial extraction of peat. From 1955, diesel locomotives are used to pull the wagons instead of horses. Extraction becomes mechanised in 1963, when Fisons acquires the company.

1970 to date

The Peatlands Today

In 1970, Thorne and Hatfield Moors became Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Amateur naturalist William Bunting (1916–1995) is credited with almost single-handedly saving what is left of Thorne Moors by his vigorous and outspoken campaigning against peat extraction. In 1972, he led a group known as 'Bunting's Beavers' which blocked drains which were threatening to lower the water table to a disastrously low level.

In 1995, the Humberhead Peatlands NNR was created. An agreement with owners Scotts Company (UK) Ltd saw peat extraction cease altogether in 2004, with the reserve expanding a year later.

Managing the moors

Natural England aims to establish the moors as centres of peatland excellence.

Restoration of the site has included re-wetting abandoned workings, which involves damming old peat drains to re-create the boggy conditions where plants can flourish. In drier parts of the site, a flock of Hebridean sheep keep birch and willow scrub in check.



Hebridean sheep

How do I get to Humberhead Peatlands NNR?

The closest towns to the NNR are Goole, Doncaster and Scunthorpe.

By public transport

Rail stations – Thorne North and South.

Contact South Yorkshire Transport on **01709 515151**.

Moorends is served by bus from Thorne.

Contact Doncaster Tourist Information on

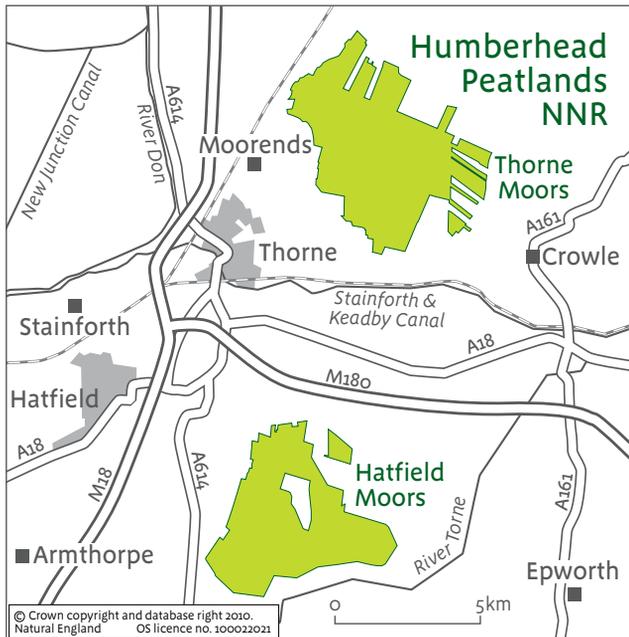
01302 734309.

Crowle is served by rail and bus. Contact Brigg

Tourist Information on **01652 657053**.

Hatfield Woodhouse and Wroot villages are served by bus. For information call Traveline on

0870 6082608.



Facilities

The nearest toilet facilities are in the main towns and villages. Toilets are available on site during events.

Events and volunteering

The reserve is open every day, all year round. There are many guided walks, open days and events throughout the year, including many suitable for families. For further information visit: www.naturalengland.org.uk

An educational programme is being developed, involving a wide range of opportunities from primary education, through to adult learning, contact the Community Outreach Adviser on **07798 694875**.

There are also opportunities to become an NNR volunteer, helping with a range of activities from scrub clearance to species surveys, visitor management and helping with events. Further details are available on the reserve's website or from the Community Support Officer on **07766 42090**.

Where north meets south

A key to the huge diversity at Humberhead Peatlands is that so many species here are at their northern or southern limits. At its northernmost limits you'll find the nightingale, as well as the reed damsel-bug and the marsh pea.

Northern types at their southern limit include the delicate pink flowers of the bog-rosemary and the large heath butterfly.



© FfPA / Peter Wilson

Thorne Moors

Seasonal spectacles

Every season has its highlights at Humberhead, but a visit in late summer is always rewarding. Walk across the Moors and you'll be rewarded with the purple haze of flowering ling, the constant buzz of insects, clouds of iridescent dragonflies and damselflies and drifts of colourful butterflies.

Earlier, in May and June, there is a fantastic display of cotton grass – like white clouds drifting across Thorne Moors.

Bountiful birds

Thorne Moors represent the most northerly stronghold in Britain of the secretive nightingale, which migrates here from the African savannah to breed. Its wonderful song can be heard in spring and early summer evenings and - contrary to popular belief – often during the daytime too.

Spring brings the bubbling call of the curlew, while from March to July the diminutive woodlark is a special visitor. Oystercatcher, lapwing, ringed plover and great crested grebe can all be spotted around the lakes during the summer, whilst winter visitors include whooper swans, pinkfooted geese and short-eared owls.

The moors are also home to some of England's magnificent birds of prey, including marsh and hen harrier, peregrine falcon, hobby, sparrowhawk and merlin.

Impressive insects

Some of Britain's rarest and most endangered insects live at Humberhead. During the summer, you should look out for black darter, four-spotted chaser and broad-bodied chaser dragonflies, as well as countless damselflies zipping above the mire during the summer.



© FLPA / Bill Baston

European nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*)

The Nightjar

The peatlands are an internationally important breeding site for the nocturnal, insect-feeding nightjar.

Once known locally as the 'gabble ratchet', in imitation of its strange churring call, the nightjar lives on the reserve's drier heathland areas, where it hunts down moths and other flying insects. It is a master of camouflage too, and almost invisible on the ground, especially when roosting or nesting in dry bracken, hence another of its names, the fern owl.

You may also spot butterflies such as the brimstone, small copper and speckled wood, while the large heath is a speciality on Thorne and Crowle Moors.

Other top bugs include the unique mire pill beetle – once thought to be extinct – and the massive, 8 cm long giant raft spider.

Peatland plants

The plant life of the moors and peat bogs is very special. Wetter parts of the site are dominated by peat-forming sphagnum mosses,

cottongrass, bog-rosemary and the sinister insect-eating round-leaved sundew. Drier places support two types of heather: cross-leaved heath and ling.

Reptiles

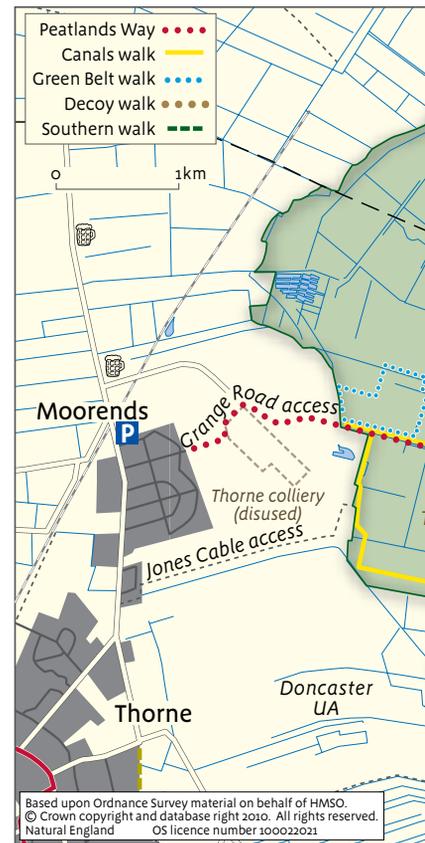
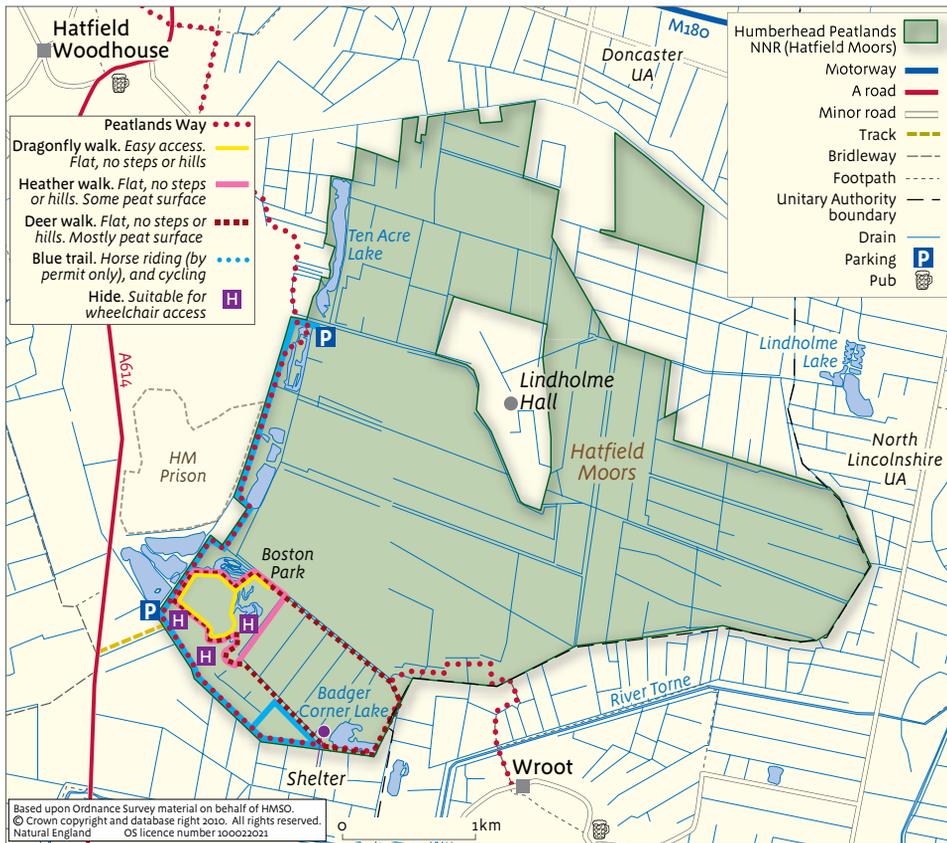
There is a good population of Britain's only poisonous snake, the adder (locally-known as 'hetherds') on the Moors.

They're best seen at the start of the warmer spring weather, which tempts them out from their winter slumber. If you're very lucky, you may witness one of nature's strangest sights, the adder dance, when two males rear up and twist and turn around each other in defence of their territories. Other reptiles include grass snake and common lizard.



© Natural England

Large heath butterfly



Walking the moors

There are picnic areas, benches and viewing points throughout the reserve, all of which are shown on interpretation boards at key access points.

The Peatlands Way long distance footpath crosses both Moors. The Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW) gives you the right to walk freely in designated areas of open space. A large proportion of the Moors is covered by the Act but not all so see maps on site for more details.

Occasionally, we may have to restrict access to certain areas for wildlife management, or your

safety. Areas that have to be temporarily closed will be clearly signed and also shown on www.naturalengland.org.uk

For more information about Open Access please contact Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council 01302 736000 or the Open Access Contact Centre 0845 100 3298.

Hatfield Moors

Hatfield Moors has three way-marked walks, including an easy access route suitable for wheelchairs, a cycle route and a horse riding route – by permit only. The easy access walk features viewing and dipping platforms and bird hides.



The main car park is at Boston Park, which is easily accessed off the A614 between Hatfield Woodhouse and Blaxton, following the brown signs. Cycle racks are available.

Foot access is from Wroot village. Follow the finger post marking a bridleway at the western end of village. Head north across the River Torne and continue down a grassy track to a metal footbridge on the reserve's boundary.

Thorne Moors

There are four flat walks across Thorne and Crowle Moors. All involve a mixture of peatland, grass and boardwalks underfoot.

Please park thoughtfully along Grange Road or at the Winning Post Centre in Moorends. Follow the brown signs along a disused road to a metal footbridge on the reserve's boundary, close to site of the old Thorne Colliery. Cycle racks are available.

For foot access, leave Marshland Road in Moorends at the brown sign going into Broadbent Gate Road. Turn left into Moor Lane and then right onto Jones' Cable track. Follow for a mile to the reserve's boundary.

Crowle Moors

Managed by Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust – follow brown signs from A161.

Take care

- There are many old peat workings, drains and water courses. You are strongly advised to keep to way marked walks and existing tracks.
- Please take responsibility for your own safety. In hot weather you will need a sunhat, drinking water and insect repellent.
- Dogs must be kept under close control at all times. You must keep your dog on a short lead between 1 March and 31 July and all year round near farm animals.
- Barbeques, motorcycles, horses and cycles are not allowed. Cycles are permitted on the cycle route and horses by permit only at Hatfield.
- Do not leave valuables in your car.
- Danger deep water. No swimming.
- Snakes live here. Do not touch them.

Please follow the Countryside Code

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

Further information:

In emergencies, contact the Reserve Office on 0300 060 2816 or 0300 060 2715.

For further information on the Crowle Moors section of the National Nature Reserve contact the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust on 01507 526667 or by email: info@lincstrust.co.uk

For Tourist Information Centres covering the area call 01652 657053 or visit www.visitnorthlincolnshire.com

Front cover image: Family day out on Thorne Moors

© Natural England / Peter Roworth

The logo for Natural England, featuring the words "NATURAL ENGLAND" in a bold, sans-serif font. "NATURAL" is in a light green color and "ENGLAND" is in a darker green color. The text is set against a solid green rectangular background.

Natural England is here to conserve and enhance the natural environment, for its intrinsic value, the wellbeing and enjoyment of people and the economic prosperity it brings.

© Natural England 2010

Catalogue Code: NE274

Natural England publications are available as accessible pdfs from: www.naturalengland.org.uk/publications

Should an alternative format of this publication be required, please contact our enquiries line for more information: 0845 600 3078 or email enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk

Printed on stock comprising 75% recycled fibre.

www.naturalengland.org.uk