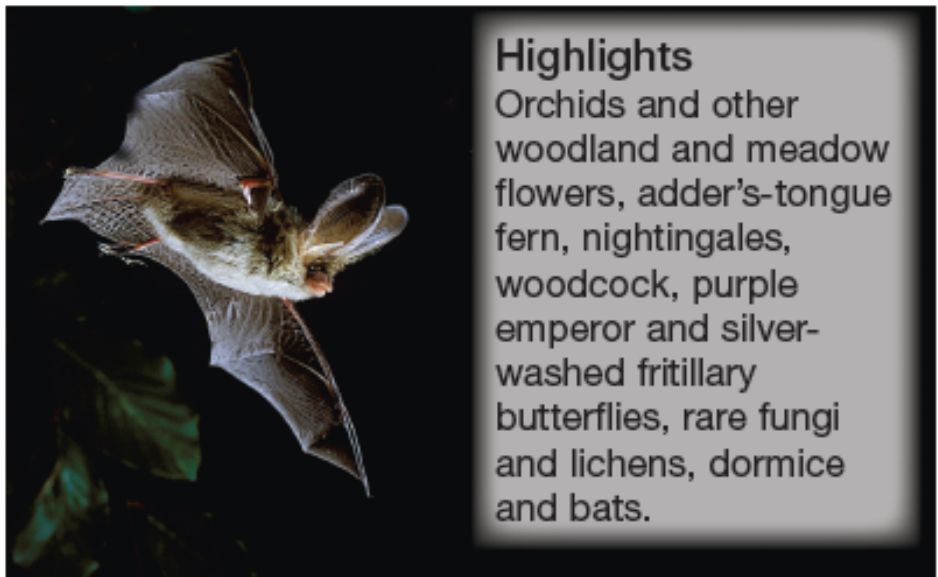


Ebernoe Common

Varied ancient wood pasture with ponds, streams, meadows and reclaimed arable land under conversion back to pasture and woodland

Ebernoe is a superb example of a Low Weald woodland with a history of traditional use. For centuries it was used as wood pasture, where commoners would turn out their cattle or pigs to graze and browse on young trees and scrub, beech mast and acorns, or on the grassy meadows in clearings.

The Trust purchased 75 hectares of the reserve in 1980 when much of the woodland was under threat of destruction. At that time many of the glades and rides had become overgrown with scrub and bracken, but repeated mowing and raking by volunteers has seen the return of a rich and varied flora: devil's-bit scabious, adder's-tongue fern and many orchids.



Highlights

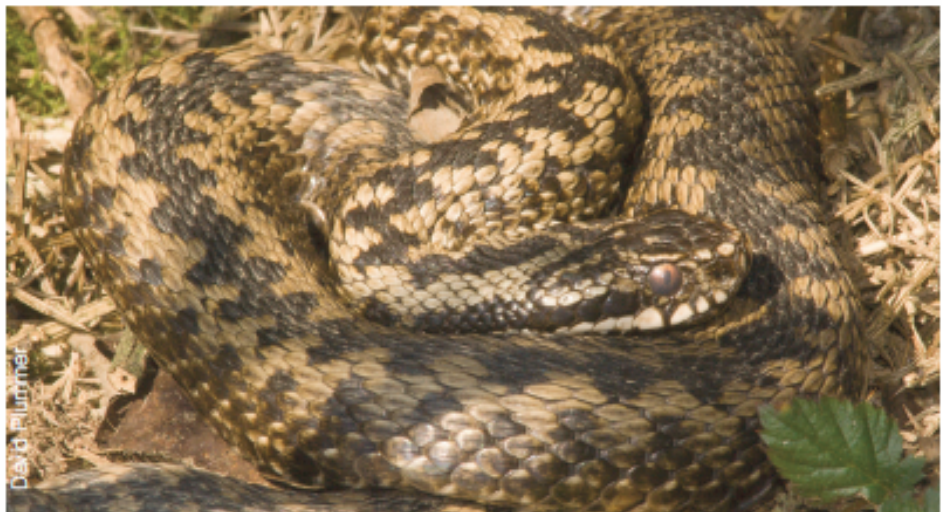
Orchids and other woodland and meadow flowers, adder's-tongue fern, nightingales, woodcock, purple emperor and silver-washed fritillary butterflies, rare fungi and lichens, dormice and bats.

long-eared bat

The ponds have also been returned to their former glory. Furnace Pond, which was associated with an iron furnace in the 1500s, and Fish Pond, which was probably used for keeping carp, have both been opened up by the removal of invasive reed-mace to achieve a balance of open water and bankside vegetation.

At Brickkiln Rough there is a small area of hazel coppice where dormice slumber and the song of the nightingale rings out over a carpet of bluebells and orchids. To the north Furnace Meadow is rich in flowers, with quaking grass, cowslip, pepper saxifrage and betony colouring the grasslands throughout the summer months. The Common was also a site for a small brick works; the moulding shed and the brick kiln — a scheduled ancient monument — are still present today, and pits still surround the site from which the sticky Wealden clay was dug to make the bricks.

The clay is very evident in the northern part of the reserve as the many paths that run through it can be quite thick and gooey in winter. Here the trees are predominantly oak and ash, but there is a great variety of other species too, including field maple, hazel and wild service tree. To the south the soils become more acidic and sandy here beech is the more common forest tree, and in places the lemon-



David Plummer

adder

David Plummer



cattle grazing the glades at Ebernoe

scented fern and wild daffodils grow. One of the striking features of this woodland is the great variety in age structure of the trees; young saplings can be found growing in the spaces opened up where aged giants have fallen. This natural process of regeneration was given a boost in 1987 when the Great Storm felled or damaged many trees throughout the reserve. All the dead and damaged timber was left in place as it provides valuable habitat for a host of insects and fungi that depend on this resource. Bats too make use of the cracks and hollows that have formed within the timber; indeed 14 of the 16 species of British bats have been recorded in the area, including thriving colonies of the rare barbastelle and Bechstein's bats. On many of the trees themselves there are communities of rare lichens which are usually not seen outside the New Forest.

This great variety of wildlife owes much to the past history of the Common. Parts of it probably had an open park-like landscape, with animals grazing between the trees. The Trust has restored low intensity grazing to the Common to maintain the flower-rich glades and rides in a more sustainable manner, and to ensure that the continued expansion

of shady trees, such as holly, do not threaten the existence of other, more light-loving plants. At the same time we need to be sure that altering the complex micro-climates within the woodland does not compromise the security of shelter-loving species, such as the bats.

The Trust has been able to purchase much of the surrounding farmland and parcels of woodland, known as Butcherland, and is now creating areas of future wood pasture. There will be a mixture of woods, pastures, meadows, hedges and rews — thin strips of woodland linking larger blocks — essential to allow creatures such as dormice and bats to move from one section to another. We are also able to keep our own livestock here to ensure that the grazing regime exactly matches the needs of the habitats that we are conserving or creating. Most of all we are able to provide the opportunity, in decades to come, for the rich and varied wildlife of Ebernoe Common to increase and expand to the surrounding countryside, at a time when so much of our natural heritage is diminishing around us.



Clockwise wood white butterfly, greater butterfly orchid, beefsteak fungi