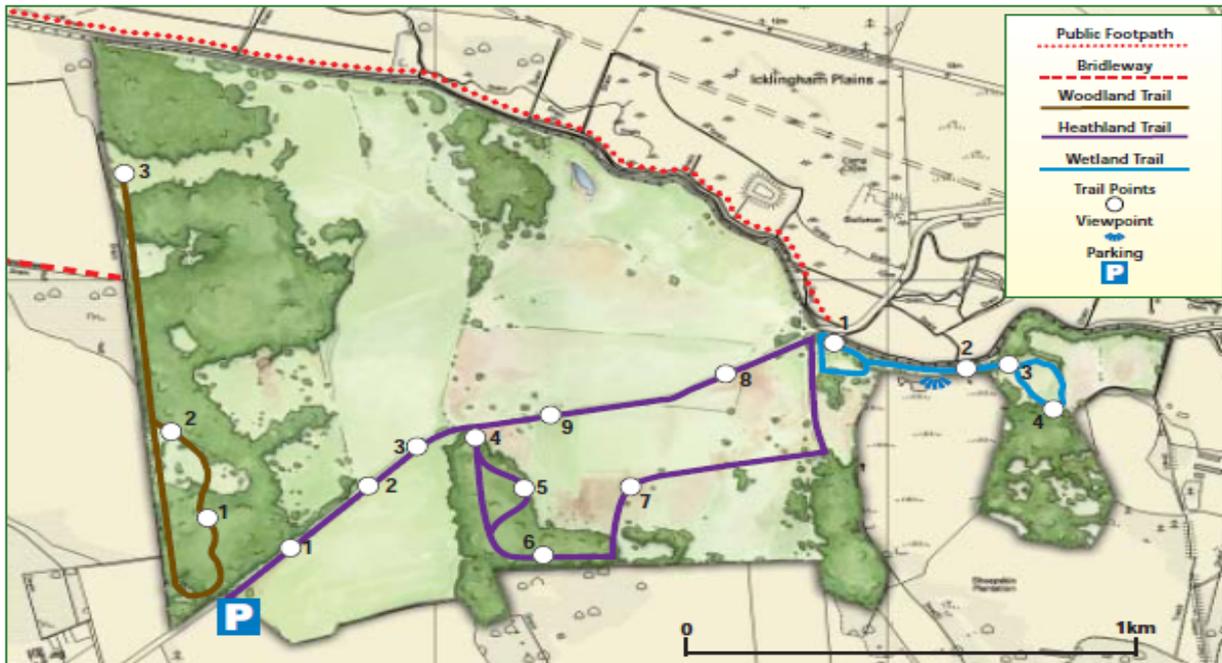




# Cavenham Heath NNR - Nature Walks



We have developed three trails. Each trail explores a different aspect of this unique site and shows how our on-going active management helps to maintain it.

Dogs are welcome on the reserve. Please be considerate to other users and clean up after your dog. A dog bin is located in the main car park. **From 1 March to 31 July dogs must be kept on a short lead to protect nesting birds (dogs can walk off the lead along the main track if they stay within the fence).**



## The Woodland Trail

Length: 2.3 km. Easy Access- 30mins. Walkers extension 1hr.

This trail includes 1000 metres of a compacted 'Easy-access' surface suitable for wheelchair and pushchair users. The remainder of the loop does not have an artificial Easy access surface, but is firm and level. The 'Walker's extension' is 1300 metres is uneven and muddy.

**1-In the Birch Woodland.** This wood is maturing allowing oaks to steadily colonise – look for young oak saplings as they slowly take over. The soil is becoming richer by the annual addition of leaf-litter which is processed by fungi. Birch grows in poor soils but oak will grow taller and stronger in rich soil and eventually shade out birch. Dead trees and decaying branches are excellent for biodiversity. Birds such as Wren, Great Tit, Blue tit, Great Spotted Woodpecker, chiffchaff, Bullfinch and blackcap may be seen.

**2. Nightjar country-** Looking out across the open ground with trees sheltering you, this glade is suitable for nightjars. Elusive summer visitors, nightjars are active at dusk and dawn feeding on moths. They make a strange churring noise on warm summer nights. They nest on the ground with camouflage being their only defence. This is one reason that during the bird breeding season dogs are kept off the heath.

**3. Wet Woodland and Fen-** notice how the wood changes as you approach the floodplain of the River Lark, with nettle, reed and sedges, muddy pools and wet woodland. Eventually you encounter the open fen. This fen and scrub is great for insects which attract summer visitors like cuckoo, grasshopper warbler and nightingale. At the end of the track you'll spot a Second World War Type 47 pillbox. A heavy machine gun would have been mounted in its open roof.



## **The Heathland Trail- Length: 3.8 km, 1-2 hours**

This trail shows aspects of Cavenham Heath's human and natural history. The wooded and heath sections of the trail are less suitable for pushchairs and wheelchairs.

**1. Birch Woodland -** (See Woodland Trail point 1 for information)

**2. Rabbits-** were introduced into Britain in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century. Rabbit farming for was one of the key industries in medieval Breckland. Rabbit grazing is brilliant at keeping the heath free from trees. Burrows and scrapes are ideal for pioneer plants, insects and nesting stone curlews. The yellow flowered Ragwort can be regarded as a problem as it is poisonous to horses, sheep and cows avoid it. However, it provides many bees, moths and butterflies with a valuable nectar and pollen food supply often when there is little else in flower-you may see the rare metallic green Forester moth. The orange and black Cinnabar moth caterpillars munch the leaves of ragwort to make themselves poisonous to birds. We control ragwort in bad years, but in small amounts regard it as an important part of the flora.

**3. The Trackway-** was an important medieval route from London to Norwich across the River Lark. For ancient travellers the heather, sheep and rabbits would be very familiar. However the wilderness would have stretched for miles in all directions and strong winds creating dust storms and sand dunes. Look for heathland flowers growing on the verge, blue Viper's bugloss, white stitchwort and the yellow mouse ear hawkweed providing nectar for numerous mini beasts. Small holes in the sandy banks could be from a green tiger beetle or a black and red solitary wasp storing caterpillars to feed its young. This profusion of insect life is an important food source for heathland birds such as the Woodlark, the Stone-curlew and Stonechat.

**4. Heather-** is the heath's most distinctive plant. Our native heathers flower August to September. Heather supports loads of insects. Each hectare supports over a million spiders. Over the next few years you may see us mowing it to rejuvenate it. In areas of really thin soil the light green string like lichens and carpet forming mosses are the only plants tough enough to survive. Lichen heath is a really rare habitat.

**5. Medieval Sheep Farming-** the slightly raised circular bank is all that remains of an old sheepfold. Two medieval manors had rights of sheep 'walking' on the heath. Sheep were kept in the fold at night so their valuable dung was collected to be used to fertilise crops. Before manmade fibres wool production was one of the main industries of the area.

**6. Once in the Birch Woodland-** you notice most trees are about the same size and age. A combination of shepherds leaving to go to war and myxomatosis in the 1940's and 50's reduced grazing and allowed the birch to gain a foothold and rapidly invade the heath. We have removed a lot of trees from the heath but will keep this wood as its good for wildlife.

**7. On the Open Heath-** you can appreciate the wide open space and views. Bracken is trying to take over and we frequently mow it to keep it in check. Grasses with thin wiry leaves can tolerate the dry conditions such as sheep's fescue and wavy hair grass. Lizards and even the rare adder may be glimpsed warming up in the early morning sun. Adders are rare and protected and we want to protect them. Bites are really rare, but do be careful in the early spring when they are coming out of hibernation and are a bit dozy. Please do not let your dog harm them in the spring.

**8. The Second World War** was important in altering the heath as large parts of it formed an airfield which remained until the 1960's. Four pillboxes, numerous slit trenches and several anti-glider ditches were built to repel German invaders. You can see the ditches either side of the track way by the twin lines of spoil heaps. The defences were part of the 'Eastern Command Stop Line'. Military ownership protected the heath from being turned into farmland.

**9. Heathland Birds** may be spotted in the open heath – including the rare Stone-curlew, woodlark, wheatear and stone chat. In the summer we hope to get 2-3 Stone-curlew nests on the heath, only 350 nest in the UK. Nests are basic - a bit of flint, some rabbit droppings being enough to impress! The birds lay only 2 eggs and the chicks are very vulnerable to foxes, stoats and crows until they fly at 6 weeks. Stone-curlew spend the winter in south Spain/north Africa and 100+ individuals usually congregate on the heath in the Autumn before migration. The heath is a key place for Stone-curlew nationally and internationally and this is why access to it is closed for part of the year.



**Wetland Trail: please follow this symbol.**

**Length 1.3km – Allow 20minutes each way.**

This trail reveals the spectrum of wetland habitats – wet woods, fen, water meadows and riverbanks.

**1. Scrub** takes over as you approach the river. Our scrub management keeps the trees young and ensures a wide variety of birds can be seen throughout the year. From April to June common whitethroats and lesser whitethroats sing here. During the autumn and winter the bushes act as feeding stations and roosts for Redwings and Fieldfares. Try to identify the various scrub species – there's alder, buckthorn, elderberry, elm and hawthorn.

**2. Along the river bank** The reedy margins are great for reed and sedge warblers in the summer, thriving on the rich invertebrates using the mud and silt. Overhead, dragonflies and damselflies, such as the banded demoiselle, hunt other insects. Improving river water quality has increased brown trout numbers and led to otter re-colonising the river. You may see water vole or even a grass snake swimming.

**3. The Secret Fen-** is being restored. A programme of cutting and grazing is improving the fen's flora. Birds such as warblers, nightingale and hobby use this area. In late summer it is full of dragonflies and damselflies.

**4. Wet woodland known as 'Ash Plantation'** has been here for about 300 years. Alder trees, which prefer wet conditions, replaced much of the ash during the last century. Mosses and the rare marsh fern also thrive in the wet conditions. The seasonal pools are vital for the success of the fern's life cycle.

#### **Contacts;**

Find out more at [www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk) and going to National Nature Reserves.

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