



Thoughts on the Suffolk Sandlings ... by a local resident

The Suffolk Sandlings is an area of beautiful, wild lowland heath, Britain's rarest wildlife habitat, which runs in places from North Suffolk to Ipswich. The landscape, once dominated by woodland, is rich in flora and fauna and a huge tourist attraction. This habitat has declined by 90% in the last century and is now very rare. The Leiston Common information board pictured below says **"This is our rain forest"!**

Perhaps as long as 4,000 years ago, large expanses of heathland had already developed in this area, a patchwork of grassland, gorse, scattered trees and heather. Grazing intensified with the introduction of sheep, around 1,000 years ago, and dominated farming in the Sandlings until recently.

Over millennia the sandy, free-draining acidic soils allowed the development of its characteristic heathland plants, dominated by heathers, acid grassland or lichens and this habitat has its own characteristic and now very rare reptiles, insects and bird species such as the adder, silver-studded blue butterfly and nightjar. **Heathland is as important for wildlife as it is beautiful to look at** so, to maintain this vital and historic landscape and to conserve the

habitat, careful management is essential and grazing has been successfully reintroduced in some areas.

Fortunately, the ecological value of the heaths is now well understood and all the significant remaining fragments of the Sandlings are now protected as a fundamental part of the Suffolk Coast & Heaths AONB (“Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty”). In the UK today there are estimated to be 143,000 acres of lowland heathland, which is about **20% of the total world resource**.

<http://www.suffolkcoastandheaths.org/our-landscape/heathland/>

There are two long-distance footpaths through the area threatened with development:

1. **The Sandlings Walk** is a 60-mile footpath that runs through the Suffolk Sandlings which used to stretch from the outskirts of Ipswich to Southwold, an area of lowland heath and Britain's rarest wildlife habitat. It was created as part of the wider habitat work supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund to safeguard the Suffolk Sandlings, linking the remaining heaths. The nightjar, one of the rare and special birds of the Sandlings, has been chosen as the logo of the Sandlings Walk and is used to waymark the trail. There is also a series of 11 sculptures by local artist Henry Tebbutt along the route, showing the nightjar in pursuit of a moth. Starting on the outskirts of Ipswich, the route passes through Rushmere Common, Sutton Heath, Rendlesham Forest, Butley Corner, Tunstall Forest, Friston, North Warren, Thorpeness, Sizewell, Minsmere, Dunwich Heath, Dunwich Forest, the Suffolk Coast National Nature Reserve and Southwold.

2. **The Suffolk Coast Path** is a [long-distance footpath](#) along the Suffolk Heritage Coast, covering 50 miles (80 km) from Felixstowe to Lowestoft.

These paths are well used by tourists, birdwatchers, walkers, cyclists, runners and horse riders – all are important assets for physical and mental health. Visitors come to the area to enjoy the peace and tranquillity, large open spaces, treasured dark skies, fresh air and the feeling of escape and being 'off-grid'. Birdwatchers come from nearby RSPB Minsmere as there are nesting European Skylarks, Nightingales, Nightjars, Tawny Owls, Barn Owls and Buzzards and the rare Stone Curlew has now returned to Leiston Common.

During the construction of 60m wide cable trenching. which could take up to 12 years to complete, footpaths and bridleways will be crossed and closed, wildlife corridors cut off, bird life disturbed and disrupted. The largest population of transitory Red Deer outside Scotland is found here, as well as Muntjak Deer, badgers, foxes and numerous butterflies and dragonflies. Minsmere Nature Reserve and several SSSIs (Site of Special Scientific Interest) are located close by and support many other nationally important species.

Wardens Trust is the holiday destination that will be closest to the proposed landfall area and the drilling equipment to be used going under the cliffs. Their website <https://wardenstrust.org/> has two excellent sub-sections at the bottom of their home page, (1) Flora and Fauna, and (2) Birds around

Wardens - both contain records of all the species that have been seen in the area.

Books covering the importance of this habitat:

The creatures shown in the 1949 King Penguin Book 'British Reptiles and Amphibia' were from the heathland and marshes around Leiston, illustrated by Paxton Chadwick, and 'In Search of Heathland' was written by his wife Lee Chadwick at Leiston Common.



Linnets

Nesting in gorse the males can easily be seen singing from the tops of the bushes.

Leiston Common is a typical Suffolk Sandlings heath, a habitat that has declined by over 80% in the last century. Agriculture, housing development and encroachment by bracken and trees are the principle causes behind the decline. These areas are now very rare. The Sandlings consists of 1% of the total low-land heath left in the world. This is our rain forest.

Without continual management heaths quickly turn into bracken and scrub and the special wildlife associated with them disappears.

Grazing with sheep is the traditional method of management. Sheep control rank vegetation and scrub and help to create a varied sward of heather and acid grassland. The Common is grazed by sheep from the Suffolk Wildlife Trust's 'flying flock'.



Green Hairstreak Butterfly

Flying in early spring this insect favours gorse and broom.



Adder

These colourful reptiles are often encountered as they bask in the sun on the open paths.

Leiston Common

British Energy notice board on Leiston Common - must be over 10 years old. Sadly it was taken down not long after this picture was taken.

