

CANFORD HEATH LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

Welcome to Canford Heath Local Nature Reserve.

This heath is one of the largest remaining heaths in Dorset, covering over 850 acres (380 hectares – equivalent to 532 Wembley Stadium sized football pitches!). Heaths like Canford should be largely open areas of heather and gorse, with few trees. During the summer months it is dominated by the purple flowering Common (Ling) and Bell Heathers, with the yellow flowers of the Western Gorse providing an attractive contrast.



Enjoying Canford Heath

Many local people and visitors come to walk, exercise dogs, ride bicycles or horses and enjoy the wildlife. The many paths make it is easy to explore all parts of Canford Heath without ever having to leave them and you can easily spend two hours walking around the site, although there are many shorter routes of around ½ hour to be enjoyed as well. Most of Canford Heath has also been designated as open access land.

The rough nature of heathland paths can be challenging, with steep gradients in places, and conditions can change after rain or dry periods, however routes and access points that are more suitable for some mobility chairs are highlighted on the map (RADAR locks are used on those gates).



Wildlife of Canford Heath

The diversity of the habitat and the summer warmth favours a variety of wildlife adapted to the heath, from insects to reptiles and birds.

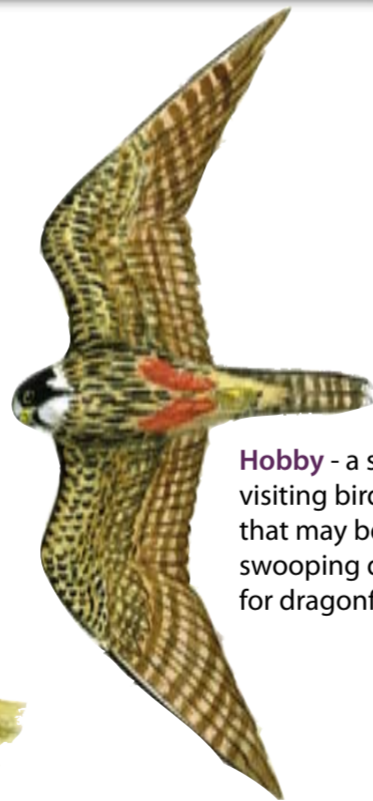
Dartford Warbler - a rare bird of southern heathland, often seen flitting across the tops of heather all year round.



Sand Lizard - often seen sunning itself on the edges of sandy tracks in the spring.



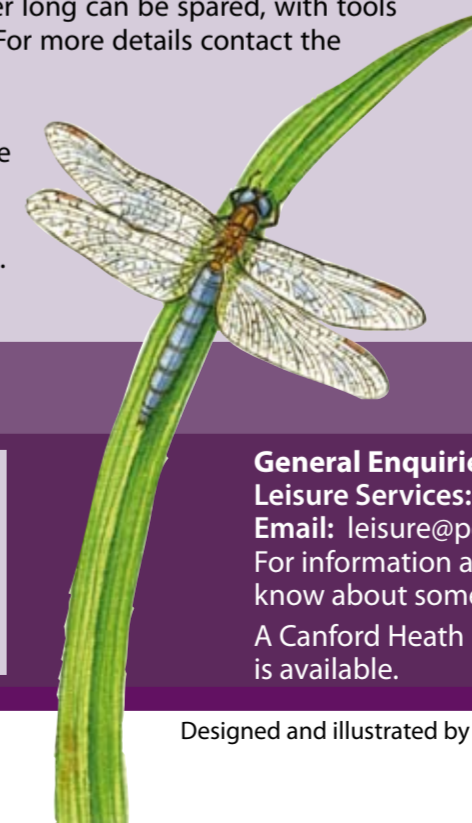
Smooth Snake - lives on the heath, favouring deep heather.



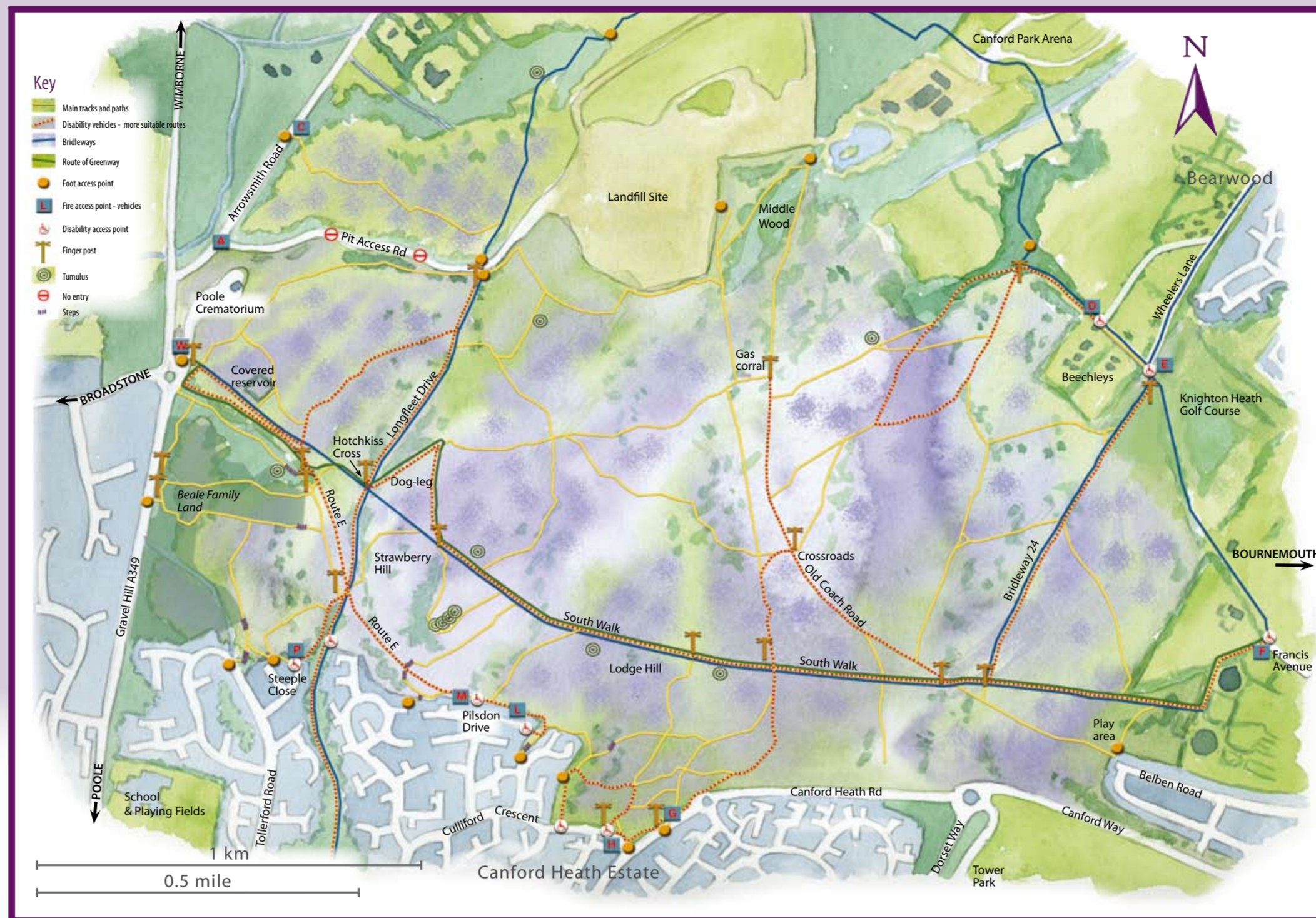
Hobby - a summer visiting bird of prey that may be seen swooping down for dragonflies.



Keeled Skimmer - an active dragonfly that can also often be seen resting on vegetation or warm stones.



Nightjar - which can be heard singing its strange metallic churr at dusk in early summer.



Heathland Code

Humans can still have a negative effect on the heath. Such activities range from unpleasant to very dangerous for legitimate site users and for this reason they are not permitted on Canford Heath.

- ▶ **Be safe – plan ahead and follow any signs.**
Plan your route, using the many paths.
Follow advice or instructions on any signs.
- ▶ **Leave gates and property as you find them.**
Gates should be shut, unless locked open.
No digging of ramps/jumps.
No dens, camps or camp fires.
Do not throw garden waste or dump rubbish.
- ▶ **Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home.**
Keep to the paths to avoid disturbing wildlife.
Litter can be dangerous to wildlife, please take it home.
Main Bird Nesting Season - 1st March to 31st July.
- ▶ **Keep dogs under close control and please pick up after them.**
By law you must have your dog under close control and they must be on a short lead during bird breeding 1st March - 31st July or when livestock are present.
Please pick up after your dog and place in a bin (it is an offence not to under the Dog Control Order 2006).
- ▶ **Consider other people**
Please use and leave the heath as you would wish to find it.
Ride Horses and Bicycles with care.
Excessive noise will disturb wildlife and other site users.



Fire - Rapid reporting, with details of the nearest access point to the Fire Service on 999, is essential in reducing the damage done. Never try to tackle them by yourself.

Motorbikes - It is illegal for motorbikes to be ridden on Canford Heath Nature Reserve. Please report any to Dorset Police on 01202 222 222, (if you feel threatened ring 999).



Looking After The Heath & Its Wildlife

Heathland is ultimately a human made habitat, which without positive action would revert to woodland and the special wildlife that it supports would disappear. Today work is undertaken to ensure the rare wildlife thrives and it remains as open heath for people to visit and enjoy. Some young Pine and Birch are cleared every winter, although others are retained as they have a role to play in small numbers. Stands of mature Pine are also important features in the landscape.

Light grazing by cattle and ponies is also being reintroduced to heaths across Dorset as a management tool to help keep the heath open and uneven in age for insects, reptiles and ground nesting birds.

Recent Times & Now

In the past the heath in this area has had many different owners, including the Wimborne family. Now the Borough of Poole owns most of Canford Heath Nature Reserve, with the Beale family owning an area by Gravel Hill Road and three other independent landowners owning the remainder.

Sand and gravel has been excavated at many locations, the largest workings were undertaken by W.H.White Plc on the northern edge of the site. The hole was then used for landfill, taking household waste from Poole and Bournemouth. Once capped it will be restored to an acid grass/heath habitat. Methane will continue to be collected from the landfill and used to generate electricity.

Getting involved – The Heathland Volunteer Network and Winter tasks

The role of a volunteer: There can never be too many eyes and ears on such a large heath reporting misuse or wildlife sightings. Anyone with an interest in the heath and its protection can be a volunteer. You can help just by knowing who to call when something happens, plus Newsletters and the Events/Tasks list would be sent out to you twice a year to keep you in touch with what is going on.

Practical Winter Tasks: There is also the opportunity to help keep the heath in shape and get fit by joining us on our winter tasks which run October through to

February! Everyone is welcome for however long can be spared, with tools and gloves provided by the Leisure Team. For more details contact the Leisure Services Team (01202 265265).

Canford Heath Local Nature Reserve – Legal Protection for SSSI's and Open Access Land

This site has been notified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. It is an offence, without reasonable excuse, intentionally or recklessly to destroy or damage any of the flora, fauna, or geological or physiographical features by reason of which the land is of special interest, or intentionally or recklessly to disturb any of those fauna. A person found guilty of any such offence may be prosecuted and liable to a fine not exceeding £20,000.

Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, a person is not entitled to be on any access land if, in or on that land, he lights or tends a fire or does any act which is likely to cause a fire, takes, or allows to enter or remain, any dog which is not on a short lead during the period beginning with 1st March and ending with 31st July in each year, or in the vicinity of livestock at all times.

General Enquiries

Leisure Services: 01202 265265

Email: leisure@poole.gov.uk

For information about Volunteering or to let us know about something you have seen.

A Canford Heath Local Nature Reserve leaflet is available.



Supported through Defra's Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund

Welcome to Canford Heath

This heath is one of the largest remaining heaths in Dorset, lying between Broadstone to the west and Knighton Heath Golf Course in the east. Since the 1940's the area of heathland has been much reduced but it still covers over 850 acres (380 hectares – equivalent to 532 Wembley sized football pitches!).

You can easily spend two hours walking around the site, although there are many shorter routes of around ½ hour to be enjoyed as well. With its valleys and hills accentuating a feeling of wilderness, it is possible to lose sight of the surrounding development. However the views across to Corfe Castle and the Purbecks should not be missed.



Enjoying Canford Heath

Since the 1980's the wildlife value has been recognised and at the same time it was becoming a very important area for informal recreation. Many local people and visitors come to walk, exercise dogs, ride bicycles or horses and enjoy the wildlife.

The many paths and tracks make it easy to enjoy all parts of Canford Heath without ever having to leave them. To help look after the heath when you visit please follow the Heathland Code on the back cover. Most of Canford Heath has also been designated as open access land.

The rough nature of heathland paths can be challenging, with steep gradients in places, however routes and access points that are more suitable for some mobility chairs are highlighted on the map (RADAR locks are used on these gates). Please be aware path conditions can change, particularly with heavy rain, and there may be times when sections are more difficult to negotiate.

Guided walks are held on the Heath and details can be obtained from Leisure Services.



History of Canford Heath

Bronze Age settlers started to clear the Birch and Oak woodland that once covered South East Dorset around 3,500 years ago to create fields and pastures. Bronze Age burial mounds can still be seen on Canford Heath.



The land was important to local inhabitants for centuries, whether providing bedding, fodder or thatching materials, livestock grazing, turf for fuel or a source for gravel, sand or clay.

Old boundary banks are still visible, the majority of which are from the 19th century Enclosures Act. Most enclosures were subsequently planted up as pine plantations and the Scots and Maritime Pine trees still influence the landscape.

Some tracks have been in use since at least Saxon times. South Walk was an important route between Christchurch and Wimborne in the 1700s, while Lady Wimborne established Longfleet Drive as an ornamental drive from Canford Manor House (Canford School) to Poole in the late 19th century.

Recent Times and Now

In the past the heath in this area has had many different owners, including the Wimborne family. Now the Borough of Poole owns most of Canford Heath Nature Reserve, with the Beale family owning an area by Gravel Hill Road and three other independent landowners owning the remainder.

During the Second World War the British and American armies used Canford Heath for military exercises. Parts of the heath are riddled with slit trenches and 'foxholes', while fragments of shells have been found.

Between 1962 and 1986 most of South Canford Heath was lost to housing and industry. A road route across the west end of the heath was started although never completed and the cut remains (Route E).



Sand and gravel has been excavated at many locations, the largest workings were undertaken by W.H.White Plc on the northern edge of the site. The hole was then used for landfill, taking household waste from Poole and Bournemouth. Once capped it will be restored to an acid grass/heath habitat. Methane will continue to be collected from the landfill and used to generate electricity.



Wildlife of Canford Heath

The heaths of Dorset should be largely open areas of heather and gorse, with few trees. Canford Heath is dominated by the purple flowering Common Heather (Ling) with the brighter flowered Bell Heather and fine Bristle Bent Grass blended in amongst it. In July the yellow flowers of Western Gorse appear giving an attractive contrast of colours.

In June or July the waving cotton-wool tufts of the Cotton Grass and the paler flowered, greyish Cross-Leaved Heath highlight the areas of wet heath and bog. Here the yellow flower spikes of the Bog Asphodel and the tiny Sundews, that trap small insects on their sticky red leaves, can also be found.

The diversity of the habitat and the summer warmth favour a variety of wildlife adapted to the heath, from insects to reptiles and birds.

The rare Smooth Snake and Sand Lizard live on the heath, the first favouring deep heather whilst the second may be seen sunning itself on the edges of sandy tracks.



Adders are also present but are wary creatures, and given the chance, normally move away from people and dogs as they feel them approach.

The Dartford Warbler is a rare bird of southern heathland, but can quite easily be seen flitting across the tops of the heather all year. While two birds that can only be encountered in the summer are the Hobby, a bird of prey that may be seen swooping down for dragonflies, and the Nightjar which can be heard giving its strange metallic churr at dusk.

Looking After the Heath Habitat and its Wildlife

Heathland is ultimately a human made habitat, which without positive action will revert to woodland and the special wildlife that it supports would disappear.

Today work is undertaken to ensure the rare wildlife thrives and it remains as open heath for people to enjoy. Pine and Birch are cleared every winter, although some are kept as they have a role to play in small numbers. Stands of mature Pine are also important features in the landscape and will be retained in suitable locations.

Rhododendron is not native but since its introduction it has spread strongly. It has little benefit to native wildlife and it is important to restore most areas back to heath.

Light grazing by cattle and ponies is also being reintroduced to heaths across Dorset as a management tool to help keep the heath open and uneven in age for insects, reptiles and ground nesting birds.

Each winter work is done to cut back vegetation along paths and fire defendable lines. This work is essential in reducing the amount of damage caused by a fire and also ensures good fire vehicle access.



Getting Involved - The Heathland Volunteer Network

The role of a volunteer: There can never be too many eyes and ears on such a large heath reporting misuse or wildlife sightings. Anyone with an interest in the heath and its protection can be a volunteer. You can help either by just knowing who to call when something happens or by acting directly when out on site. Newsletters and the Event/task list are sent out twice a year to those on the Volunteer Network.

The Volunteer Network has recently evolved from the independent volunteer group Canford Heath Heathwatch, which began in 1989. In the 1980's, before the heath was being managed, its misuse led to the habitat being damaged and local people wanted to take action to stop it, leading to the formation of Heathwatch.

Practical Winter Tasks: There is also the opportunity to help keep the heath in shape and get fit by joining us on our winter tasks which run from October through to February! Everyone is welcome for however long can be spared, with tools and gloves provided by the Leisure Team. For more details call Leisure Services.



Due to the rarity of the habitat and its wildlife, Canford Heath was designated under British law as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), then under European law as a Special Protection Area (SPA), Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and part of the western end as a RAMSAR site, providing it with the formal recognition that allows its management and protection for the future. Heathland occurs in other European countries but it is also limited and under threat.

Leisure Services - Contact Us

The Council's Leisure Services Team look after the heath and work closely with the Police, Fire Service and other bodies, under the Urban Heath Partnership banner.

If you want information about Volunteering or to let us know about something you have seen, please contact us:

Phone: 01202 265265

Email: leisure@poole.gov.uk

Write: Leisure Services
Borough of Poole, 30-32 Northmead Drive
Creekmoor, Poole BH17 7RP

We can supply this information in this leaflet in large print, on audio tape or have it translated for you. A member of staff will be happy to discuss this with you, please call: 01202 265265.

Damaging Heathland - Help Stop It!

Education, fencing, patrolling and enforcement have helped reduce misuse. However humans can still have a negative effect on the heath through fires, motorbikes, dog fouling, uncontrolled dogs, garden waste and rubbish dumping. Such activities range from unpleasant to very dangerous for legitimate site users and damage the heath, for this reason they are not permitted on Canford Heath.

Fires: Rapid reporting, with details of the nearest fire access point to the Fire Service on 999 is essential in reducing the damage done. Never try to tackle them by yourself.

Motorbikes: It is illegal for motorbikes to be ridden on the nature reserve. Please report any to Dorset Police on 01202 222 222. Whilst they may not attend at that time, the incident should be logged and the matter followed up.

Dogs: When under close control dogs are welcome. By law they must be on short leads during the main bird breeding period, 1st March to the 31st July, to protect birds such as the Nightjar and Dartford Warbler. They should also be on a lead when livestock are present.

Please pick up after your dog to ensure the site is a pleasant place for all to visit and the habitat isn't damaged. It is an offence under the Dog Control Order 2006 to not pick up and fines will be issued.

Supported by

Canford Heath

Canford Heath

Information & map for

Local Nature Reserve

Heathland Code

- ▶ **Be safe – plan ahead and follow any signs.**
Plan your route, using the many paths.
Follow advice or instructions on any signs.
- ▶ **Leave gates and property as you find them.**
Gates should be shut, unless locked open.
No digging of ramps or jumps.
No dens, camps or camp fires.
- ▶ **Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home.**
Keep to paths to avoid disturbing wildlife.
Litter can be dangerous to wildlife, please take it home.
The main bird nesting season is the 1st March to the 31st July.
- ▶ **Keep dogs under close control and please pick up after them.**
By law you must have your dog under close control and they must be on a short lead during bird breeding 1st March - 31st July or when livestock are present.
Please pick up after your dog and place in a bin (it is an offence not to).
- ▶ **Consider other people.**
Please use and leave the heath as you would wish to find it.
Ride horses and bicycles with care.
Excessive noise will disturb wildlife and other site users.
- ▶ **General Enquiries - call Leisure Services 01202 265265.**
- ▶ **FIRE - call 999.**
- ▶ **MOTORBIKES - call Police 01202 222 222 (if you feel threatened call 999).**