**Metropolitan Open Land: Hampstead Heath**

Hampstead Heath is 320 hectares or 790 acres in size. Only a few kilometres from the city centre it welcome many millions of visitors each year. It includes the highest point in Central London and some of the best views across the capital.

There are 30 ponds which are environmentally important and some are famously used for swimming. The Heath is home to rare species including kingfishers, birds of prey, stag beetles and grass snakes. Remnants of ancient woodland and hedgerow exist, alongside rare acidic grassland, heathland habitats and wildflower meadows.

Since grazing stopped in the last century the largely treeless heathland and agricultural landscape has been replaced in part by expanding woodland and scrub. Also present today are grassland, hedgerows, ponds and wetlands, along with remnant areas of the original heathland.

Small areas of acid grassland are of particular note, with plants such as heath bedstraw, oval sedge and tormentil. Attempts are being made to retain, restore and extend these areas as well as small areas of the rare heathland habitat which gives Hampstead Heath its name.

**Trees**

There are over 800 identified veteran trees on the Heath. Rare species include wild service tree and midland hawthorn.

## Fungi and plants

Over 500 species of fungi have been recorded on Hampstead Heath, including the rare bracket fungus Ganoderma lucidum.

Noteworthy plants include broad leaved helleborine, lady fern, hard fern and lily of the valley (woodland); cowslip, black knapweed, oxeye daisy, devil's-bit scabious and pignut (grassland); marsh marigold, purple loosetrife and water mint (wetland).

## Invertebrates

A quarter of Britain's spiders have been found on Hampstead Heath, including the tube-web spider Atypus affinis at its only known London site. Twenty three species of butterfly, including breeding colonies of purple hairstreak can be seen. Seventeen species of dragonfly and damselfly have been recorded at ponds across the Heath. This is only two species less than the list for the whole of the neighbouring county of Hertfordshire.

## Birds

Over 180 bird species have been recorded in recent times on Hampstead Heath.

Noteworthy birds include lesser spotted woodpecker, whitethroat, garden warbler, jackdaw, stock dove, hobby, great crested grebe, common tern and kingfisher (breeding) and siskin, redwing, fieldfare, swallow, wheatear, woodcock, meadow pipit, shoveler and gadwall (wintering or on migration).

## Animals

Hampstead Heath is one of the best places to see bats in London and Natterer's, Daubenton's, noctule, and both species of pipistrelle are present. Moles, foxes, hedgehogs and muntjac deer are other mammals found on the Heath. The fascinating and totally harmless grass snake is found at one of its closest locations to the centre of London.