

Nature Conservation Sites in Rushmoor

with Paul Howe

Our speaker is Biodiversity Officer for both Rushmoor Borough Council and Hart District Council, and also serves as Secretary of the Rushmoor Urban Wildlife Group, who were our hosts for an evening of talks and an entertaining quiz.



Dartford Warbler

Paul's talk focused on the three different kinds of conservation sites we have in the borough, internationally, nationally and locally recognised, covering c. 940 hectares.

The most important, and the one that has greatest impact on Rushmoor, is the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA). It is a 'Natura 2000' site, which is a European interpretation of the Bern Agreement that provides protection for birds, notably the nightjar, the woodlark and the Dartford warbler through the provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space as mitigation for all development in the borough.



Nightjar

Next in the hierarchy come the Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), a national designation under the Countryside Wildlife Act 1981. They can be biological or geological, can cover a wide range of habitats and are usually extensive. There are five in Rushmoor: Basingstoke Canal; Bourley and Long Valley; Foxlease and Ancells Meadows; Yateley and Hawley Commons; Eelmoor Marsh.



Woodlark

Finally, there are the local sites, which in Hampshire are designated SINCs (Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation). They are administered on behalf of the districts by the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre and cover all kinds of habitats, protected species or even just amenity value. These are evaluated on a rolling basis, with local councils helping to identify, monitor and maintain them. Rushmoor has 38 such sites, covering 475 hectares, mostly in the south of the borough. SINCs are especially important because they protect habitats and features that cannot be

reproduced, such as ancient woodlands. You can find more information about SINCs at:

<https://www.hants.gov.uk/landplanningandenvironment/environment/biodiversity/informationcentre/sincs>.

Rushmoor has two local nature reserves that partly fall within its boundaries. These are Rowhill Nature Reserve in the south-west and Lakeside Park in the Blackwater Valley. There is no access into Lakeside Park from the Rushmoor side of the River Blackwater.

However, it is not only the formally designated sites that are important for wildlife. Gardens, parks, road verges, allotments, waterways and railways all provide valuable habitat and, crucially, green corridors from one habitat to another. Thus, although Rushmoor is a very small, urban borough, there is plenty of opportunity to see and enjoy wildlife.

RBC has a five-year Biodiversity Action Plan, which provides a framework for initiatives to protect and improve biodiversity across Aldershot and Farnborough. Local groups, including the Rushmoor Urban Wildlife Group, carry out the work to deliver this plan. Details can be found at:

<http://www.rushmoor.gov.uk/article/8994/Biodiversity-action-plan-for-Rushmoor-2016---2021>.

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Details of the activities of the Rushmoor Urban Wildlife Group can be found on their website:
<http://www.ruwg.org.uk/community/rushmoor-urban-wildlife-group-13385/about-us>.