



Humberhead Peatlands

National Nature Reserve



Welcome to Humberhead Peatlands NNR

It's hard to visit the remarkable Humberhead Peatlands NNR in South Yorkshire without feeling you've discovered something a bit special.

The boggy, lowland mire that makes up the reserve is one of the country's rarest and most threatened habitats. Covering 2878 hectares, the equivalent of roughly 3,000 football pitches.

The reserve is made up of Thorne, Goole, Crowle Moors and Hatfield Moors – all remnants of wetland that occupied the floodplain of the Humberhead Levels thousands of years ago.

The mixture of habitats, including peatland, marsh, woodland and gravel pits, means the area is incredibly rich in wildlife. The reserve supports over 5,000 species of plants and animals, of which more than 4,000 are insects – many of these are scooped up in the air by one of the reserve's star attractions; the mysterious, nocturnal and very rare nightjar.



A peatlands timeline

About 14,000 years ago

The Ice Age

The area is covered by the shallow waters of the great post-glacial Lake Humber.

10,000–4,000 years ago

Early Pre-history

Ice age glaciers retreat and the first hunter-gatherers move in. The dense woodland they find is home to deer, beaver and predatory wolves.

4,000–2,000 years ago

Bronze and Iron Ages

The deep layer of peat which now covers the area is the result of the clearance of the woodland by prehistoric man. Enhanced by climate change, this led to the gradual formation of boggy, waterlogged conditions about 4,000 years ago. A Neolithic wooden trackway was found under peat on Hatfield Moors in 2004.

2,000 years ago

Romans

The Romans probably came into the area in the late 70s AD, establishing a major settlement at Doncaster (Danum).

2,000–1,000 years ago

Anglo-Saxon and Viking

A strong Scandinavian presence is evident from place names such as Eastoft and Althorpe. Saxons first settle and name Thorne, Crowle and Hatfield.

1000–1450AD

Middle Ages

Norman overlords establish Hatfield Chase, a 270-square-mile hunting forest including Thorne Moors. The first known map of the area is the Inclesmoor map of c.1450.

1450–1700

Tudors and Stuarts

Successive monarchs hunt deer on Hatfield Chase. Dutch engineer Cornelius Vermuyden undertakes the first comprehensive drainage of the area in 1626.

1700–1900

Industrial Revolution and Victorian Britain

Small companies start commercial peat extraction for animal litter in the 1880s. Peat is dug by hand, and transported by narrow-gauge railways to the processing works. A horse drawn barge system is also established on Thorne Moors.

1900–1970

Twentieth Century

The British Moss Litter Company continues the commercial extraction of peat. From 1955, diesel locomotives are used to pull the wagons instead of horses. Extraction becomes mechanised in 1963, when Fisons acquires the company.

1970 to date

The Peatlands Today

In 1970, Thorne and Hatfield Moors became Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Amateur naturalist William Bunting (1916–1995) is credited with almost single-handedly saving what is left of Thorne Moors by his vigorous and outspoken campaigning against peat extraction. In 1972, he led a group known as 'Bunting's Beavers' which blocked drains which were threatening to lower the water table to a disastrously low level.

In 1995, the Humberhead Peatlands NNR was created. An agreement with owners Scotts Company (UK) Ltd saw peat extraction cease altogether in 2004, with the reserve expanding a year later.

Managing the moors

Natural England aims to establish the moors as centres of peatland excellence.

Restoration of the site has included re-wetting abandoned workings, which involves damming old peat drains to re-create the boggy conditions where plants can flourish. Other areas are prone to flooding and we need to reduce this to stop the bog mosses being swamped.



Water level management on Thorne Moors

How do I get to Humberhead Peatlands NNR?

The closest towns to the NNR are Goole, Doncaster and Scunthorpe.

By public transport

Rail stations – Thorne North and South.

Contact South Yorkshire Transport on **01709 515151**.

Moorends is served by bus from Thorne.

Contact Doncaster Tourist Information on

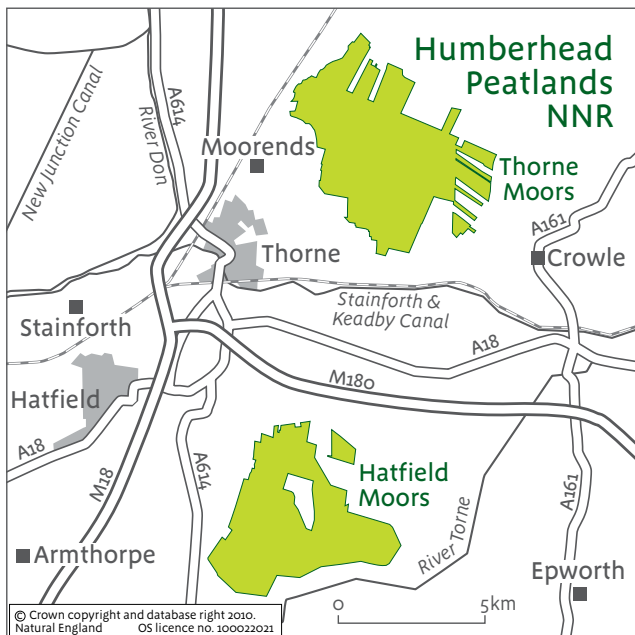
01302 734309.

Crowle is served by rail and bus. Contact Brigg

Tourist Information on **01652 657053**.

Hatfield Woodhouse and Wroot villages are served by bus. For information call Traveline on

0871 200 2233.



A group walk on Hatfield

Facilities

There are toilets on Hatfield Moors at the Boston Park car park but none at Thorne Moors - the nearest being in the town.

Events and volunteering

The reserve is open every day, all year round. There are many guided walks, open days and events throughout the year including many suitable for families. For more information, follow [/humberheadpeatlandsnnr](https://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Reserves-and-Parks/Humberhead-Peatlands-NNR), see local press, or contact the Reserve Manager/Community Support Officer for the Humberhead Peatlands NNR, Unit 1a, Green Tree Warehousing, Tudworth Road, Hatfield, Doncaster, DN7 6HD. 07766 420290.

We are always looking for new recruits and have a wide range of practical habitat management tasks and work days for individuals and groups. Also species surveying and event and wardening tasks on the NNR. If you've got some spare time then why not think about helping us maintain the Humberhead Peatlands? Weekdays, evenings or weekends. Contact as above.

Special species

Thorne and Hatfield Moors are full of special plants and animals. Look out for the pink flower of bog-rosemary or wild cranberry in the best boggy areas. You can enjoy several types of orchid on the reserve.



© FLPA / Peter Wilson

Thorne Moors

Seasonal spectacles

Every season has its highlights at Humberhead, but a visit in late summer is always rewarding. Walk across the Moors and you'll be rewarded with the purple haze of flowering ling, the constant buzz of insects, clouds of iridescent dragonflies and damselflies and drifts of colourful butterflies.

Earlier, in May and June, there is a fantastic display of cotton grass – like white clouds drifting across the Moors.

Bountiful birds

In winter and summer the peatlands are fantastic places for bird watching. Breeding birds like stonechat, tree pipits and grasshopper warbler are joined by many others passing through.

Spring brings the bubbling call of the curlew, while from March to July the diminutive woodlark is a special visitor. Oystercatcher, lapwing, ringed plover and great crested grebe can all be spotted around the lakes during the summer, whilst winter visitors include whooper swans, pinkfooted geese and short-eared owls.

The moors are also home to some of England's magnificent birds of prey, including marsh and hen harrier, peregrine falcon, hobby, sparrowhawk and merlin.

Impressive insects

The Moors are famous for their insects, of which at least six species are found nowhere else in Britain. The mire pill beetle makes tiny holes in the peat, like woodworm, and feeds on the roots of mosses. During the summer, you should look out for black darter, four-spotted chaser and broad-bodied chaser dragonflies, as well as countless damselflies zipping above the mire during the summer.



European nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*)

The Nightjar

The peatlands are an internationally important breeding site for the nocturnal, insect-feeding nightjar.

Once known locally as the 'gabble ratchet', in imitation of its strange churring call, the nightjar lives on the reserve where it hunts down moths and other flying insects. It is a master of camouflage too, and almost invisible on the ground, especially when roosting or nesting in dry bracken, hence another of its names, the fern owl.

You may also spot butterflies such as the brimstone, small copper and speckled wood, while the large heath is a speciality on Thorne and Crowle Moors.

Peatland plants

The plant life of the moors and peat bogs is very special. Wetter parts of the site are dominated by peat-forming sphagnum mosses, cottongrass, bog-rosemary and the sinister, but beautiful, insect-eating round-leaved sundew. There are two types of heather: cross-leaved heath and ling.

Reptiles

There is a good population of Britain's only venomous snake, the adder (locally-known as 'hetherds') on the Moors.

They're best seen at the start of the warmer spring weather, which tempts them out from their winter slumber. If you're very lucky, you may witness one of nature's strangest sights, the adder dance, when two males rear up and twist and turn around each other in defence of their territories. Other reptiles include grass snake and common lizard.

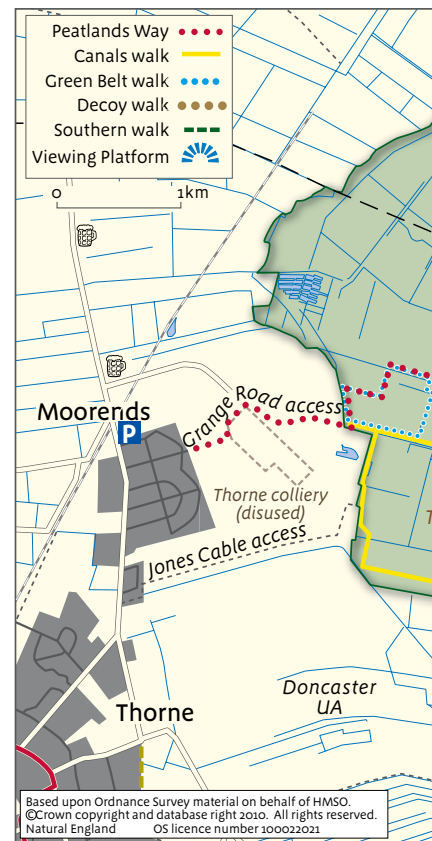
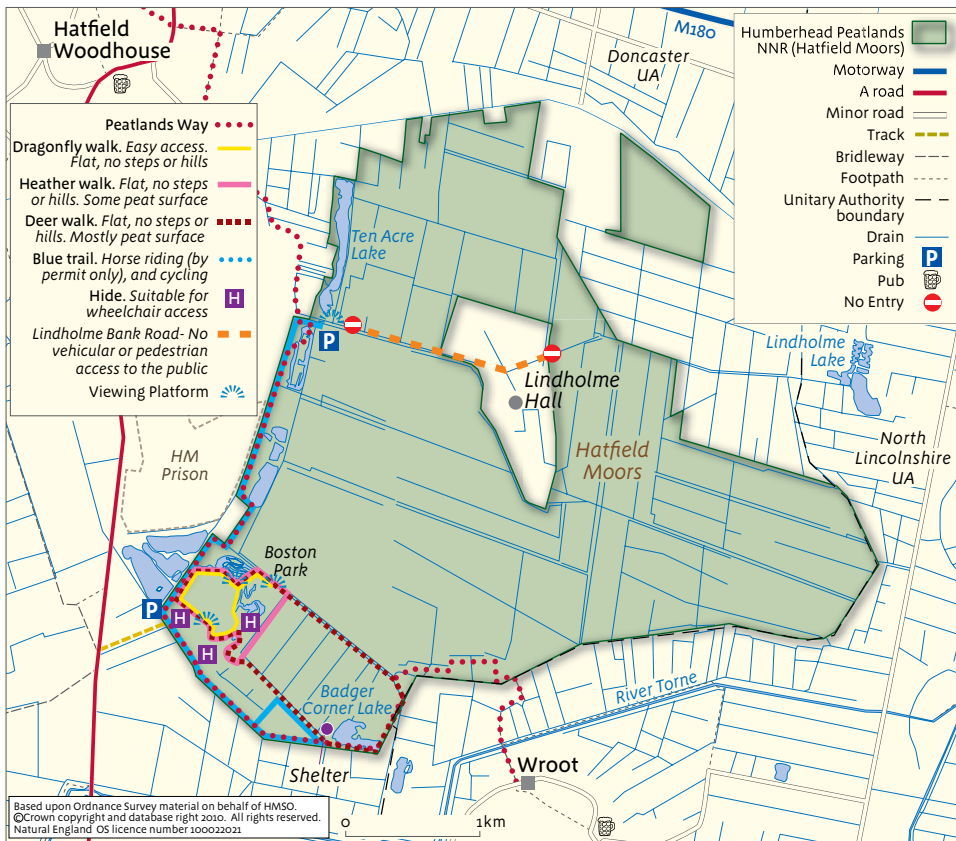
Walking the moors

There are picnic areas, benches and viewing points throughout the reserve, most of which are shown on interpretation boards at key access points.

The Peatlands Way long distance footpath crosses both Moors. The Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW) gives you the right to walk freely in designated areas of open space. A large proportion of the Moors is covered by the Act but not all so see maps on site for more details.



Large heath butterfly



Occasionally, we may have to restrict access to certain areas for wildlife management, or your safety. Areas that have to be temporarily closed will be clearly signed and also shown on www.naturalengland.org.uk

For more information about Open Access please contact Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council 01302 736000 or the Open Access Contact Centre 0845 100 3298.

Hatfield Moors

Hatfield Moors has three way-marked walks, including an easy access route suitable for wheelchairs, a cycle route and a horse riding route

– by permit only. The easy access route features viewing and dipping platforms, bird hides and resting places.

The main car park is at Boston Park, which is easily accessed off the A614 between Hatfield Woodhouse and Blaxton, following the brown signs. Free and accessible parking, disabled toilets and cycle racks are available.

Foot access is from Wroot village. Follow the finger post marking a bridleway at the western end of village. Head north across the River Torne and continue down a grassy track to a metal footbridge on the reserve's boundary.



Thorne Moors

There are four flat walks across Thorne and Crowle Moors. All involve a mixture of peatland, grass and boardwalks underfoot.

Please park thoughtfully along Grange Road or at the Winning Post Centre in Moorends. Follow the brown signs along a disused road to a metal footbridge on the reserve's boundary, close to site of the old Thorne Colliery. Cycle racks are available. For foot access, leave Marshland Road in Moorends at the brown sign going into Broadbent Gate Road. Turn left into Moor Lane and then right onto Jones' Cable track. Follow for a mile to the reserve's boundary.

Crowle Moors

Is managed by Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust and North Lincolnshire Council – follow brown signs from A161.

Take care

- There are many old peat workings, drains and water courses. You are strongly advised to keep to way marked walks and existing tracks.
- Please take responsibility for your own safety. In hot weather you will need a sunhat, drinking water and insect repellent.
- Dogs must be kept under effective control at all times. You must keep your dog on a short lead between 1 March and 31 July and all year round near farm animals.
- Camping, fishing, barbeques, motorcycles, horses and cycles are not allowed. Cycles are permitted on the cycle route and horses by permit only at Hatfield.
- Do not leave valuables in your car.
- Danger deep water. No swimming.
- Snakes live here. Do not touch them.

Please follow the Countryside Code

- Be safe, plan ahead and follow any signs.
- Leave gates and property as you find them.
- Protect plants and animals and take your litter home.
- Keep dogs under effective control.
- Consider other people.

Further information:

In Emergencies, contact 0300 060 6000.

For further information on the Crowle Moors section of the National Nature Reserve contact the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust on 01507 526667 or by email: info@lincstrust.co.uk or North Lincolnshire Council on 07717 587387.

For Tourist Information Centres covering the area call 01652 657053 or visit www.visitnorthlincolnshire.com

Front cover image: Family day out on Thorne Moors

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