

# Pebblebed Heaths

## National Nature Reserve FAQs

### What is an NNR?

National Nature Reserves (NNRs) protect some of the nation's most important habitats, species and geology and provide 'outdoor laboratories' for research. Most NNRs also offer opportunities to schools, specialist interest groups and the public to experience wildlife at first hand and to learn more about nature conservation.

### How many NNRs are there?

NNRs are established under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. As well as the creation of National Parks, this Act makes provision for the establishment and maintenance of nature reserves, further provision for the management of public paths and access to open country, and for matters connected with the purposes for preserving and enhancing natural beauty. So although an NNR is not the same as a National Park it is covered in the same Act. The first NNR to be established in Britain was Beinn Eighe in 1951, with the objective of protecting the ancient pinewood west of Kinlochewe in the Scottish Highlands. There are currently 43 NNRs in Scotland and 224 NNRs in England with a total area of over 94,400 hectares - approximately 0.7% of the country's land surface.

### Who manages NNRs?

Natural England is the government's adviser for the natural environment in England and manages about two thirds of England's NNRs. The remaining reserves are managed by organisations approved by Natural England. These include the National Trust, the Forestry Commission, the RSPB, the Wildlife Trusts, local authorities and some Estates, including Clinton Devon Estates.

### When did the Pebblebed Heaths become an NNR?

The site was legally declared an NNR in January 2020. This will be celebrated by a public launch later in the year.

### Wasn't the site already a designated conservation area?

The Pebblebed Heaths is located within the East Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Since the 1990s a significant proportion of the site has had both UK and European conservation designations including Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Protection Area (SPA) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC). In addition, the site is designated Open Access land under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW) 2000. Together these designations provide the site and the habitats and species it supports with excellent legal protection against damage and inappropriate development.

## Why become an NNR?

England's National Nature Reserves are the crown jewels of England's natural heritage. The vision of NNRs is to see England's nature restored, enriched and reconnected to people. By becoming an NNR the Pebblebed Heaths gains recognition as an area that is worth protecting and joins a nationwide partnership dedicated to delivering the NNR vision. The NNR status supports rather than extends the existing designations and legal protection.

## Who will manage the Pebblebed Heaths NNR?

Management responsibility will remain the same. The majority of the NNR covers land currently owned by Clinton Devon Estates and managed on their behalf by the Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust. Additional areas are managed by the RSPB and the Devon Wildlife Trust. These organisations will continue to be responsible for the management of their own land parcels. However, a new NNR management partnership will be formed of these land managers, owners and other key organisations such as Natural England and East Devon AONB to advise on the strategic direction of the NNR.

## What area is included in the Pebblebed Heaths NNR?

The NNR encompasses an area of 1160 hectares and closely covers the existing footprint of the pre-existing designated areas. It includes the following commons: Aylesbeare; Bicton; Bystock; Colaton Raleigh; Dalditch; East Budleigh; Hawkerland; Withycombe Raleigh; Woodbury; Venn Ottery. The NNR also incorporates two additional areas that did not previously have any statutory conservation designations: Dalditch Plantation and Mutters Moor.

## Will this change public access to the heaths?

Declaration as an NNR will not change existing access rights. Although the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) only allows open access to people on foot with cyclists and horse riders restricted to bridleways, Clinton Devon Estates applied to the Access Authority to give a general permission for individual horse riders and cyclists to use the heaths, so long as the user is acting in accordance with the CRoW Act legislation. This access remains and is significantly greater than most other areas in England covered by CRoW legislation. We want to inspire people, promote learning, and encourage involvement in the wider landscape. We will continue to encourage responsible recreation on the heaths with the aim of balancing the needs of both people and wildlife. Visitor infrastructure across the site will be upgraded over the next 5 years following the public consultation that took place in autumn 2019.

## Will the NNR designations change what I can do on the heaths?

There will be no change to permitted activities on the heaths, but pre-existing use restrictions still apply. Camping, fires, motor sports, the use of drones or metal detectors and the driving of any vehicle, other than a mobility scooter, remain prohibited. Participation in organised games and sports, or in activities organised or undertaken for a commercial purpose (including dog walking) can only be undertaken with specific landowner permission. Wider East Devon legislation relating to the maximum number of dogs (six) that can be walked by an individual and the requirement to pick up and dispose of dog waste also apply.

## How will being a NNR change the management of the heaths?

Management will continue as before to fulfil the legal obligations of the management partners under existing national and European conservation designations. These are to enhance the open heathland landscape and its associated designated features. Designated features include both priority habitats and rare species associated with heathland. Although Dalditch Plantation and Mutters Moor remain county wildlife sites despite being part of the NNR area they are managed in the same manner as the rest of the heaths and regarded as being just as important in terms of their ecological and recreational value. During the first year of the partnership an overarching master plan will be formed which will look at the opportunities to make the heaths an even better place for people and wildlife.

## How will you involve the public?

We will be looking to build on the public engagement work we already do. This includes putting on public events, education work with schools and other groups and providing volunteering opportunities. We know that the heaths are an important green space enjoyed by thousands of local people in East Devon for a whole range of different activities. During the first year of the NNR being declared we intend to work with those who visit and love the heaths to understand what aspects of the site they value and cherish in order to help inform our management going forward.

## Where can I find out more about the Pebblebed Heaths NNR?

We are currently creating a website for the NNR; this will also sign post you to other relevant web content. You can follow our partnership organisations on social media and can sign up to our email newsletter to receive updates from the heaths quarterly. You can also join us for our events which run throughout the year but in particular during Heath Week in July. Clinton Devon Estates have also published a special edition of Countryside Matters to celebrate the launch of the NNR, available in hard copy or as a download online.

[www.pebblebedheathsnnr.com](http://www.pebblebedheathsnnr.com)

<https://www.pebblebedheaths.org.uk/>

<https://www.facebook.com/PebblebedHeathsConservationTrust/>

<https://www.devonwildlifetrust.org/>

<https://twitter.com/DevonWildlife>

<https://www.facebook.com/Devonwildlife/>

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/reserves-and-events/reserves-a-z/aylesbeare-common/>

<https://www.facebook.com/RSPBLoveNature>

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