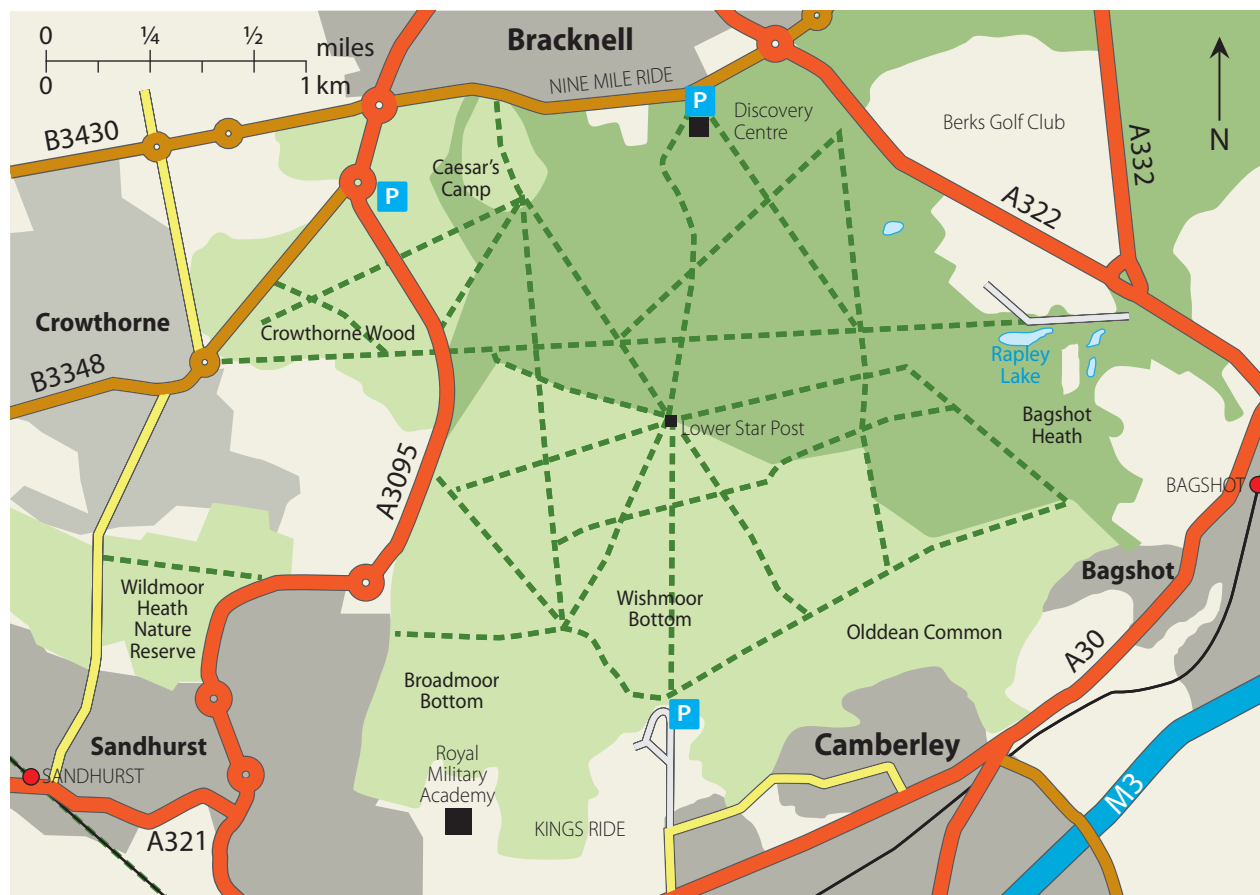


Swinley Forest and Wishmoor

This 2,000 hectare (5,000 acre) area comprises a substantial part of the Thames Basin Heaths in the county, with compartments of richly-mixed deciduous and coniferous woodland interspersed with open heath and birch-encroached gorse-land, with mires and bogs, woods and open heathland between Bracknell and Camberley. A considerable part falls within the Crown Estate lands, and has been open to public access, which has given rise to the potential for conflict between wildlife conservation and recreation, particularly as this is a popular area for mountain biking. The Crown Estate has recognised the conflict, and in 2013 published a revised map of cycle routes designed to reduce it. In its publicity material for the area, the importance of visitors keeping dogs under control is stressed. The area is also used by the nearby Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst for exercises, so be prepared to see fully-armed and camouflaged soldiers on your visit! There is much for birdwatchers and other naturalists looking for typical heath species to find at any

time of the year in the public areas such as Crowthorne Woods, Caesar's Camp, Wishmoor Bottom and Old Dean Common. On the east of the site lies Rapley Lake, large enough to attract Little Grebes, but mainly noted for its dragonfly community.

The area has been studied comprehensively for some years. It holds a substantial population of Firecrests, and of Dartford Warblers, which peaked at around 40 pairs before the cold winters of 2009/10 and 2010/11 reduced numbers to one or two individuals.. In winter this is the best area for wintering finches, with Crossbills, Siskins and Lesser Redpolls likely, and it is worth checking Chaffinch flocks for the regular Bramblings. These species can occur in very substantial numbers, often late in winter or in early spring. Areas of open heath and bracken may still hold a few Stonechat and Reed Bunting and this is one of the more reliable sites for Great Grey Shrike, which has occasionally over-wintered.



Access: Car park at the Look Out Discovery Centre of the B3430 to the north of the site (SU877662). Charges apply, closed early in the evening – do not use for Nightjar hunts. Alternatively, kerb-side parking in Kings Ride, Camberley (SU875622) and there is a small car park near Caesar's Camp (SU854655).

Facilities: toilets, snacks and coffee shop at the Discovery Centre.

Web Information: Bracknell Forest Borough Council publishes information about parking on its website (www.bracknellforest.gov.uk) following the links Leisure and culture / The Look Out Discovery Centre / The Look Out general information. The Crown Estate has a section on its Windsor estate which includes the Swinley Forest on its website (www.thecrownestate.co.uk, following the links Windsor / Forestry) but currently (2013) no access information is set out.

Breeding season surveys have disclosed 25 to 30 pairs of Redstarts in most years, with a similar number of Tree Pipit territories, 20 or so pairs of Stonechats and 30 or so pairs of breeding Woodlarks in addition to the Firecrests and Dartford Warblers. An evening visit might produce churring Nightjars, up to 38 pairs of which have been counted, roding Woodcock and calling Tawny Owls.

Species

Resident: Tawny Owl, Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Stonechat, Dartford Warblers (numbers vary greatly), common tits, including Coal Tit, Nuthatch, Treecreeper, Linnet.

Spring: Cuckoo, Tree Pipit, Willow Warbler, Redstart, numbers of Woodlark build up.

Summer: Nightjar numbers, Woodcock, Spotted Flycatcher, Firecrest, occasional Hobby.

Winter: Wandering Crossbill, chance of Brambling, variably sized flocks of Siskin and Lesser Redpoll. Redwings and Fieldfares.

Scarcer visitors: Wryneck (May 2001), Great Grey Shrike (several winters), Hen Harrier (Oct 2011).

