



Lewes Downs (Mount Caburn) NNR

Welcome to the
National Nature Reserve



Welcome to Mount Caburn

Lewes Downs (Mount Caburn) NNR is a chalk hill and valley with south-facing slopes, clothed in flower rich grassland with scattered scrub. It is one of the best places in the country to enjoy the outdoors and experience spectacular wildlife. From the hill fort in the centre of the Reserve, visitors enjoy spectacular panoramic views of the South Downs, Ouse Valley and the Wealden landscape to the east. The Reserve is owned and managed by the Glynde Estate, who work in partnership with Natural England Reserve Managers and Advisors

Why visit

Mount Caburn's 49 hectares of ancient, traditionally managed chalk downland has extensive south facing slopes, perfect for sun loving flowers and their associated insects, such as rare butterflies. Mount Caburn is part of the larger Lewes Downs Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) encompassing more downland to the north and west. As an excellent example of orchid-rich chalk grassland, the Lewes Downs SSSI has been given the European designation of a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). In addition to the wildlife value of the site, it also contains the Caburn; the best preserved and most important Bronze Age hill fort in Sussex (English Heritage Monument Number 405932).



Burnt tip orchid

© Sussex Wildlife Trust / Michael Blencowe



Scarce forester

© Sussex Wildlife Trust / Michael Blencowe

What makes Mount Caburn special?

The south facing slopes allow many warmth loving species to thrive, such as the sweet-smelling herb marjoram, deep-blue round-headed rampion, tiny chalk milkwort and the bright yellow horseshoe vetch.

As well as the fragrant and pyramidal orchids typical of these downs, the site has the largest British population of burnt-tip orchid. Amongst the common wild roses on the lower slopes, the rare small-leaved sweet briar can be found.

Attracted by the nectar and food plants for their caterpillars, the summer air can be full of butterflies, such as Adonis, chalkhill blue and silver-spotted skippers. Day-flying moths, such as the metallic green scarce forester and the red and black six-spot burnet can also be spotted. Skylarks, meadow pipits, yellowhammers, corn buntings, kestrels and buzzards are amongst the birds that find their homes and food on Mount Caburn. If you're lucky, you might also catch a glimpse of the elegant peregrine falcon.

History and culture

The first (inner) rampart of the fort was constructed in the Middle Iron Age (c. 400BC) and encloses 1.9 hectares. This was extended by the addition of a second rampart, probably during the Saxon period (around 800 AD) as a defence against Viking raids. Archaeologists have found evidence that the camp was in continuous use, up to the Norman invasion in the 11th century. Nearby is the 'Ranscombe' hill fort of similar antiquity. The commanding position of the Caburn was clearly of great strategic importance in an age when the sea came much further into the Ouse valley than is the case today.

The flora and fauna on the reserve has flourished because of years of traditional grazing practices, which are reflected in the management methods used to maintain the grassland wildlife today.

Mount Caburn was designated under S.16 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949 and was declared a National Nature Reserve in 1984. It was included in the Lewes Downs Site of Special Interest (SSSI) in 1986, which was also designated as a European Special Area for Conservation (SAC) in 2005. The National Nature Reserve lies within the boundaries of the new South Downs National Park, declared in 2011.



Chalk flowers

© Natural England / Joanna Carter

Seasonal highlights

Spring: Bird song marks the start of spring, with the sweet sound of skylarks often heard hovering over the Reserve's grassland. The skylarks and meadow pipits nest in grass tussocks on the open slopes, while in the patches of hawthorn, blackthorn and privet scrub, dunnocks, linnets and yellowhammers find homes. Bird watchers may be fortunate to spot migrants, such as redstarts, pied flycatcher or ring ouzel as they head West to their summer nesting grounds. Blackthorn flowers earliest in spring, with a delicate white blossom that can be as early as March.

Summer: Summer is the best time to appreciate the abundance of flowers that bloom on the Reserve. From May, you can see the bright yellow flowers of birds-foot trefoil and horse-shoe vetch, all pea family plants that are important as food for caterpillars of various blue butterfly species. The tiny multi-coloured milkwort flowers can also be spotted in early summer, in any colour from dark blue, purple and pink to white. The month of May sees the rare burnt-tip orchids flower; other orchids such as common spotted and pyramidal can be spotted brightening the grassland from June.

The wildflowers provide nectar for numerous butterflies and other insects, such as the common and Adonis blue butterflies, silver-spotted skippers and scarce forrester moths, which can be seen fluttering about in June. From late July, chalkhill blue butterflies flock in great numbers to feed on the



Common blue

© Natural England / James Ciles



© Natural England/PN Watts

Skylark and chicks

sweet-smelling wild marjoram. All summer, buzzards and kestrels enjoy the hot thermals on the southern slopes, circling or hovering whilst they hunt their prey. A lucky visitor might hear the 'jangling keys' song of the rare corn bunting during summer months. Intrepid lepidopterists monitoring night-flying moths often encounter the green glow of the mysterious glow worm, common on the slopes, due to the rich supply of their food – downland snails.

Autumn: Hawthorn bushes and wild rose on the hillside turn red with haws and rose hips, brambles burst with blackberries and blackthorns are heavy with sloes, providing a feast for birds and small mammals wanting to get their fill before winter sets in. Migrating birds also pass through the Reserve as they return to the Continent.

Winter: Circling buzzards and hovering kestrels and the much rarer fast flight of the peregrine falcon can all be spotted on a winter walk over Caburn. The deep 'cronk' call of the raven can also be heard. Grazing sheep help manage the reserve in winter time, their feeding habits keeping the variety of grassland sward length that allows so many flowers and insects to flourish in summer.

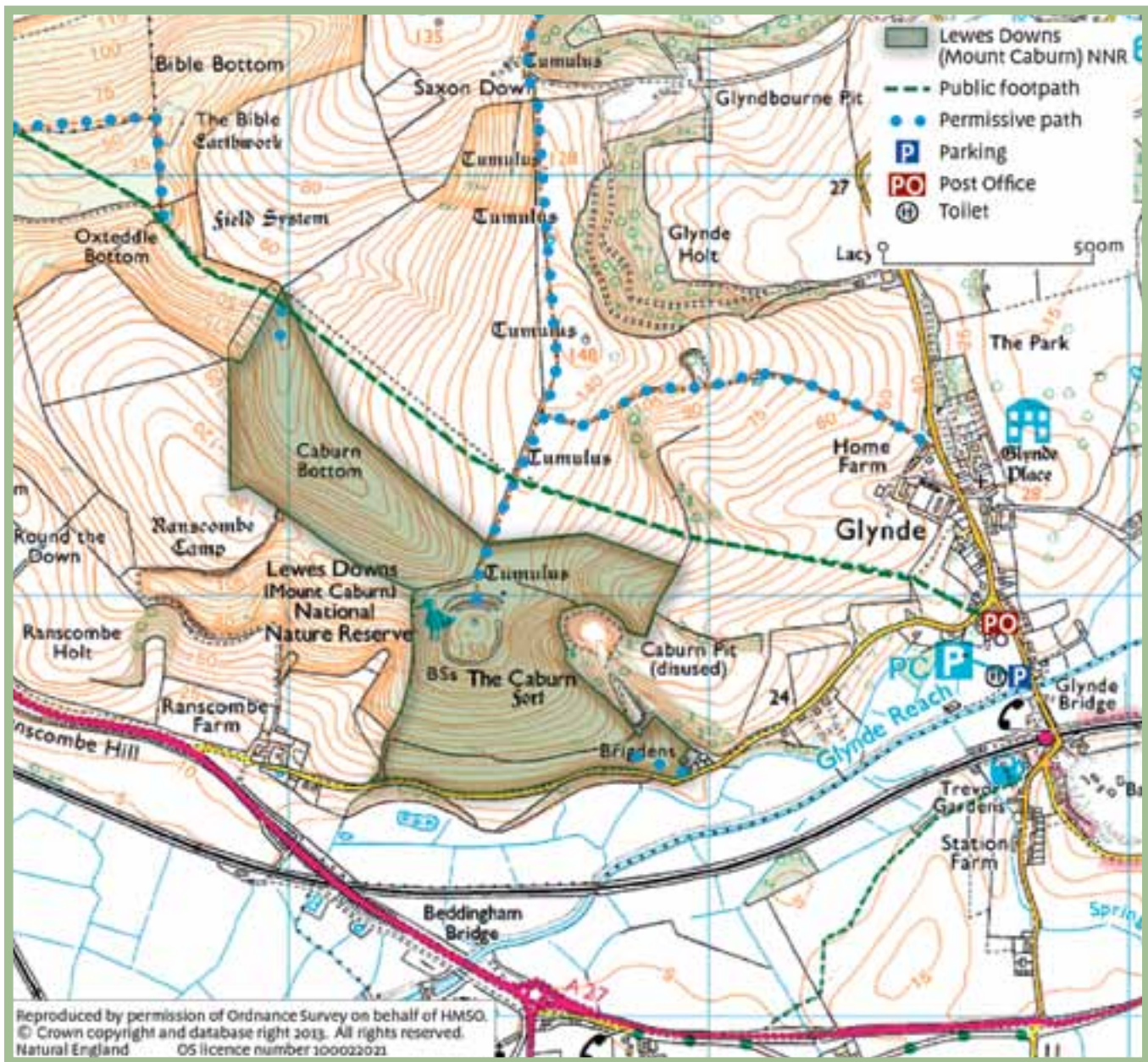
Management

The National Nature Reserve is managed by Natural England under an agreement with the owners, the Glynde Estate.

Wildflower-rich grassland, as found on Mount Caburn, is the product of centuries of grazing following woodland clearance. In the late 18th century, the local tenant farmer, John Ellman, developed the first Southdown sheep here, by crossing the breeds of East and West Sussex to produce an animal well suited to the relatively nutrient-poor downland pasture. In their heyday, Southdown sheep numbered in their millions and were farmed all over the world, but now the Southdown is a rare breed. Other, more modern breeds of sheep and cattle are used to graze and maintain the open turf, essential for the survival of the rare plants and insects which survive in this habitat.

From autumn to winter, sheep are grazed on the site, and in summer this may switch to low-level grazing by cattle. This helps achieve a mix of mostly short grassland with scattered long tussocks in which insects and other invertebrates can hide. Certain areas are left ungrazed at specific times to protect orchids and other rarities.

Small areas of scrub and a patch of ash woodland in the south-western corner of the Reserve, are left as shelter for insects, small mammals and birds. Invasive scrub and burrowing rabbits on the Caburn hill fort are controlled, to protect its archaeological integrity, in liaison with English Heritage, the organisation responsible for the care of such Scheduled Ancient Monuments.



Contact

East Sussex National Nature Reserves team
 Green Barn, Gayles Farm
 Seaford Road, Friston, East Sussex BN20 0BA

Find out more at www.naturalengland.org.uk
 or by calling 01323 423962

How to get there

Access: Lewes Downs NNR is 'open access' land, enabling visitors to take advantage of wandering freely around the site. We do however recommend keeping to the paths to avoid unnecessary disturbance of wildlife, particularly during the nesting season and flowering season. The site is open to the public all year round, free of charge. There are steep slopes leading up to Mount Caburn NNR.

By foot: The Reserve may be reached from Glynde village by the public footpath starting opposite the village shop or along the licensed path which starts opposite the entrance to Glynde Place. Another path over Saxon Down joins the licensed path north of the Reserve. Each route involves climbing a moderately steep hill for approximately 1 kilometre.

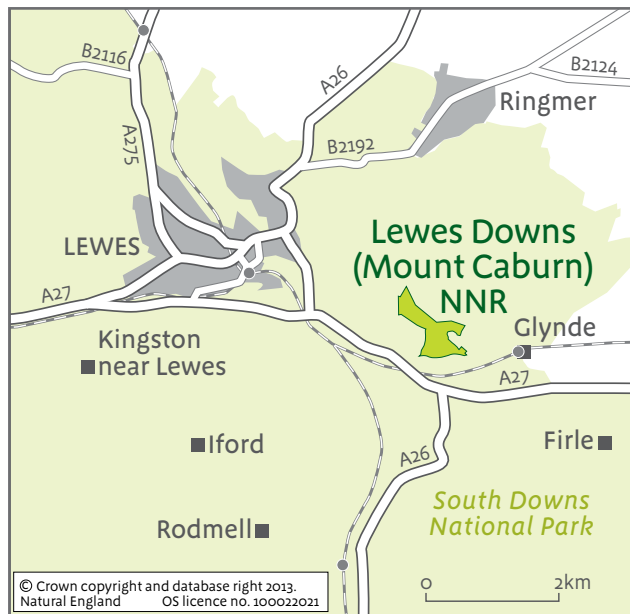
By rail: The station in Glynde village is only 1 stop from Lewes on the Brighton – Eastbourne/Hastings route.

By bus: Buses 25, 38, 124, and 125 connect the village of Glynde to Alfriston, Barcombe, Berwick, Brighton, Cooksbridge, Lewes and Ringmer. See www.travelinesoutheast.org.uk for bus timetables and stops.

By car: The village of Glynde is just off the A27 between Lewes and Polegate.

Car parking: There is some car parking available in Glynde village, BN8 6SX.

Glynde village: There are public toilets, a pub, a village shop, and a children's playground in the village.



Please follow the [Countryside Code](#) when visiting the Reserve.

- Please keep dogs under effective control to protect grazing animals and sensitive wildlife. Dogs must be kept on a short lead **between 1 March and 31 July**, to help protect ground nesting birds, and all year round near farm animals.
- Please leave no trace of your visit and take your litter home
- Please leave gates and property as you find them and follow paths unless wider access is available
- Camping and fires are not allowed within the Reserve
- Mountain bikes and horses can cause severe damage to the turf and riders must keep to bridleways
- Respect other people – By law, cyclists must give way to walkers and horse-riders on bridleways.
- Plan ahead and be prepared – You are responsible for your own safety and for others in your care.

For further information please contact:

Tel: 0300 060 2513

www.naturalengland.org.uk

Front cover image: Mount Caburn and poppies

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Natural England is here to secure a healthy natural environment for people to enjoy, where wildlife is protected and England's traditional landscapes are safeguarded for future generations.

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