

and shrubs, as a valued grazing resource. Today Natural England maintains a balance between trees, shrubs and open areas on the commons, retaining an attractive landscape rich in biodiversity. Targeted removal of trees and scrub restores open grassland for wild flowers and insects that depend on a grassland environment. At the same time vistas across the Cotswold landscape are restored and maintained, while retaining tree cover for shelter, habitat and landscape value.

## Partnerships

The National Nature Reserve is managed in partnership with the National Trust and the local communities of Sheepscombe, Cranham, Edge and Painswick as well as Butterfly Conservation, local colleges and universities and the Red Helleborine Restoration Group among others. The legacy of John Workman and his sister Doreen Warmsley have also played a vital part in making the reserve what it is today.

Natural England is the government's advisor on the natural environment. Our responsibilities include managing National Nature Reserves. NNRs were initially established to protect sensitive features and to provide 'outdoor laboratories' for research. Their purpose has widened since those early days. As well as managing some of our most pristine habitats, our rarest species and our most significant geology, most Reserves now offer great opportunities to the public as well as schools and specialist audiences to experience England's natural heritage.

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**Front cover image: View across Painswick to Sheepscombe Common and Blackstable Wood from Rudge Hill**  
All photographs: © Rob Wolstenholme



**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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# Cotswold Commons and Beechwoods

National Nature Reserve





National Nature Reserves (NNRs) represent many of the finest wildlife and geological sites in the country. Our first NNRs emerged in the postwar years alongside the early National Parks, and have continued to grow since then.

Established in 1981, the Cotswold Commons and Beechwoods NNR is set in the classic English Cotswold countryside of steep limestone scarps, wide valleys, pastures and beautiful villages.

## Wildlife

The beechwoods are amongst the most diverse and species rich of their type. Dominated by beech, there are also ash, oak, whitebeam, wych elm and alder trees. Woodland shrubs are well represented, particularly holly and yew. The grassland commons are amongst the richest habitats for wild flowers and butterflies in England, hosting a great variety of flora with over 130 species of wild flowers and 15 species of orchid.

During the summer months the grassland commons come alive with a huge range of insects including six species of blue butterfly and the increasingly rare Duke of Burgundy. Other butterflies such as silver-washed fritillary and white letter hairstreak can be found in the sunny

glades and rides throughout the woodland. At night bats feed on the hundreds of moths that take to the air while beneath them glow worms can be seen on warm summer evenings.

## A Working Landscape

The reserve follows the scarp slopes around the beautiful Painswick Valley, towering beechwoods interspersed with species rich grassland commons, a working landscape that has existed more or less unchanged for many hundreds of years. The beechwoods were traditionally managed to supply timber, firewood and charcoal from as early as the 12th century and these practices created the diverse woodland habitats that are found there today. Current management retains this diversity by maintaining rides and glades, worked coppice, high forest timber and firewood production as well as areas of non-intervention woodland.

The grassland commons have been preserved through their value to the community as grazing land, and some commoners still exercise their traditional rights. Grazing suppresses the dominant tor grass allowing wild flowers to flourish. The retention of the commons as open

**The Cotswold Commons and Beechwoods NNR extends across 7.5km of the Gloucestershire Cotswolds. Situated between Gloucester, Cheltenham and Stroud, there is ready access from the M5 motorway and the A417.**

grassland makes them popular with walkers who enjoy the views across the Painswick Valley, the Severn Vale and the Black Mountains beyond.

## Management

Common rights holders are not always able to provide suitable grazing. A herd of Belted Galloway cattle, jointly owned by Natural England and National Trust, provide bespoke grazing as required.

Traditionally the grassland commons were maintained as open grassland with very few trees

