

# Castor Hanglands NNR



## Welcome to the National Nature Reserve

Castor Hanglands contains a remarkable variety of plant and animal life. The Reserve has four distinct habitats – woodland, grassland, wetland and scrub, each of which has its own special wildlife.

## History

The history of the area goes back over 2,000 years. The Western boundary of the Reserve follows King Street, a Roman Road connecting Peterborough to Ancaster. Castor Hanglands wood is thought to have been woodland for over 1,000 years: the woodland in Castor is mentioned in the Domesday Book (1087), and the name 'hangra' is Old English for a wood on a hill. The woods later became part of the Mediaeval hunting Forest of Nassaburgh.

The grassland, scrub and wetland areas of the reserve are part of Ailsworth Heath. This land was ploughed around 800 years ago, leaving distinct ridges and furrows which can still be seen today. In about 1350, cultivation was abandoned, and the Heath became common land, grazed by sheep, cattle and ponies belonging to commoners in the village of Ailsworth. The Heath was later celebrated in the writings of Helpston's 'peasant poet', John Clare, who was the first person to record many of the plants, birds and other wildlife found there. In 1953 the remaining areas of woodland and heath were declared as one of Britain's first National Nature Reserves to preserve this unique part of our natural heritage.



Meadow grasshopper. © Zoe Wilson

## Grassland

For centuries the open grassland on Ailsworth Heath was grazed by sheep and cattle. This traditional management allowed many grasses and wildflowers to survive. Common grazing ended by the 1930's and today's management seeks to maintain the grassland by grazing with sheep and cattle in the traditional way.

## Woodland

Ancient woodlands such as Castor Hanglands are especially rich in plants and animals. Small areas of the woodland are still managed by traditional coppicing, cutting the trees on a rotational basis every 20-30 years. The remaining woodland is left to develop naturally.

## Scrub

Scrub is a mixture of shrubs and bushes such as hawthorn, blackthorn, wild privet, spindle, dogwood and wild rose. Many of the patches of scrub grew up on Ailsworth Heath after common grazing ended in the 1930's.

Patches of scrub are cut back regularly to encourage the younger bushy growth that provides the right conditions for its unique wildlife.

## Ponds and Wetlands

In parts of the reserve, the water table lies just below ground level, making the land boggy and waterlogged for much of the year. There are also a number of ponds throughout the reserve which support many aquatic plants and animals. Eighteen species of dragonfly have been recorded as well as all three species of British newt. Frogs, toads and grass snakes are also seen regularly.

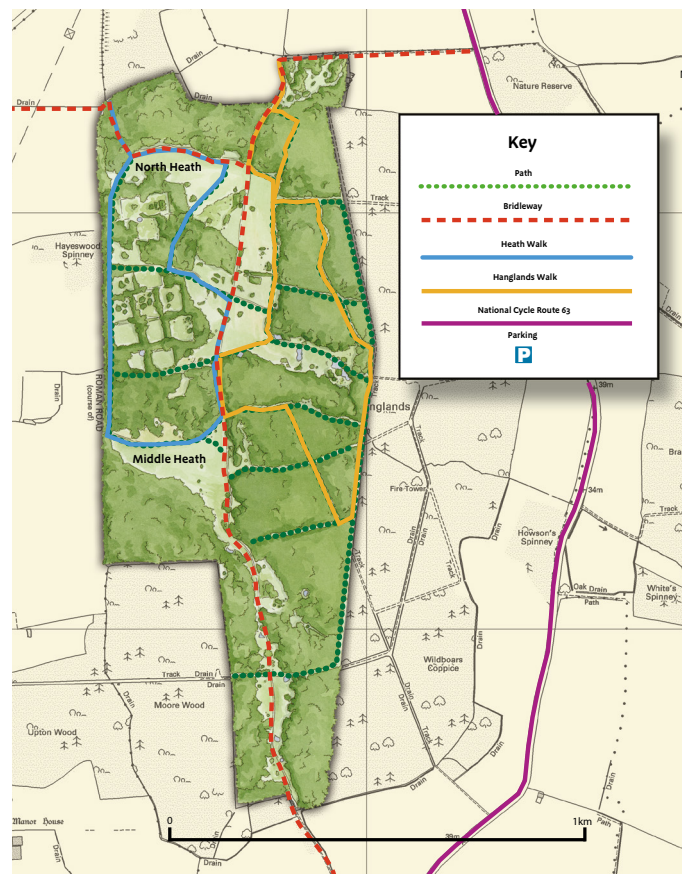
## Visitors

Help us to look after this special area by following a few simple rules:

- Access **on foot only** – please keep to the main paths. Paths may be muddy and uneven. The nature of the ground means that it is not suitable for wheelchair access.
- No ball-games, frisbees, or kites – rare plants may be damaged.
- Dogs must be kept under close control, and **on a lead** when livestock are present.
- **Please clear up after your dog.**
- No camping, fires or barbecues.
- Please take all litter home with you.

## Location and access

Castor Hanglands is situated 2 miles North of the village of Ailsworth, 4 miles West of Peterborough in Cambridgeshire.



**By car:** The nearest parking available is in the Forestry Commission site at Southey Wood, on the Wansford-Bourne road, from which there is a 500m walk to the reserve.

**By bus:** Buses from Stamford and Peterborough stop hourly in Ailsworth (30 minutes walk).

**By bike:** A Public Bridleway runs North-South through the length of the Reserve, and another crosses east-west, connecting with the parking area at Southey Wood. Horse riding and cycling are permitted only on the bridleways.

## Facilities

There are no facilities available on site, toilets and refreshments are available during normal business hours at the farm shop one mile north of the Reserve. There is also a shop, and public houses in Ailsworth, two miles to the south.

## Contact

West Anglia National Nature Reserves – Collyweston Group

Email address: [enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk)

Website: [www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-nature-reserves-in-england](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-nature-reserves-in-england)