

Key habitats in Bexley

Bexley contains a wide variety of wildlife habitats, including woodland, heathland, rivers, ponds, marshes, grassland and "wasteland" - the latter a term usually given to the open, flower-rich habitat which develops on brownfield sites.

Grassland

Grasslands vary from close-mown lawns and sports pitches to flower-rich meadows. There are wildflower meadows in several of Bexley's parks. Grasslands are common and widespread in Bexley, and vary from close-mown lawns and sports pitches to flower-rich meadows. There are extensive wildflower meadows in several of Bexley's open parks, notably Foots Cray Meadows, Hall Place and East Wickham Open Space, and a number of smaller meadow areas.

Grazing marsh

Erith and Crayford Marshes are the last remnants in south London of the grazing marshes which once bordered the whole of the tidal Thames. Crayford and Erith Marshes are among the few remaining fragments of the grazing marshes in London. They support a strong population of the threatened water vole, as well as a great diversity of birds, plants and invertebrates.

Heathland

Heathland is the term given to lowland areas on acid soils that are dominated by heather and other dwarf shrubs. Heathland is a rare and declining habitat in London, and supports a number of specialised plants and animals. Once widespread in Bexley, we now have just one small area within Lesnes Abbey Wood.

Ponds and lakes

Ponds and lakes are wonderful havens for wildlife, providing habitat for amphibians, water birds, aquatic plants and invertebrates. Bexley has sizeable lakes at Southmere, Lamorbey and Danson Park, and over 50 smaller ponds in its parks, open spaces and schools, with many more in private gardens.

Reed beds

Reed beds are a very important wildlife habitat. Numerous birds and invertebrates rely on reed beds, and they also support populations of the rare water vole. Bexley has some quite extensive reed beds associated with the grazing marshes and along the Thames, as well as smaller areas around ponds, lakes and ditches elsewhere in the borough.

Rivers and streams

Bexley is lucky to have some beautiful stretches of river. These include the tidal Thames with its extensive intertidal mud flats and sections of the Cray and Shuttle. There is also a network of dykes in Belvedere and Crayford which are classified by the Environment Agency as main rivers. These are home to a tremendous range of fish, aquatic plants and invertebrates, as well as the rare water vole and charismatic birds like the kingfisher, and provide important green corridors for people and wildlife.

Wasteland

The habitat which often develops on former industrial sites and other brownfield land is far from waste in wildlife terms. The combination of abundant nectar-rich flowers and patches of bare ground is ideal for many rare invertebrates and birds such as the specially-protected black redstart.

Wasteland is by nature a transient habitat, with sites being redeveloped and new areas becoming vacant. There are still small patches of this valuable habitat scattered over the borough, particularly in the north, and these support rare insects such as the brown-banded carder-bee. One way to help redress the loss of wasteland is to put brownfield-style green roofs (or "brown roofs") on new buildings.

Woodland

Woodlands are wonderful places for people and wildlife. The most important woodland for wildlife is ancient woodland; this is defined as woodland that has had continuous tree cover since 1600, but most ancient woods date back to the last Ice Age. These woods support a number of plants and animals which are rarely found away from ancient woodland.

Bexley has several wonderful ancient woodlands, from Lesnes Abbey Wood in the north of the borough to Chalk Wood and Joyden's Wood in the far south. Other ancient woods include Churchfield Wood, Bexley Woods and North Cray Wood. These have superb displays of bluebells and other wild flowers in spring, including, at Lesnes Abbey, London's only natural population of wild daffodils.

Also very important for wildlife are the wet woodlands which have developed along the river valleys: Parish Wood and Hollyoak Wood beside the River Shuttle, Beverley Wood on the Wyncham Stream, and The Alders in beside the River Cray in Foots Cray Meadows.