

A little guide

- to Scilly's heathland
and what can be found



Heathland may seem fairly barren to begin with but if you look closely you will be able to see all sorts of plants and creatures. Due to exposure to the elements many plants are very small so you will have to get down on your hands and knees!

In this leaflet you will find some of the more common plants, animals and features that can be seen on heathland - there are lots more to be found.

A good field guide book will help with identification. Otherwise just look at the variety of what can be seen and describe what you can see.

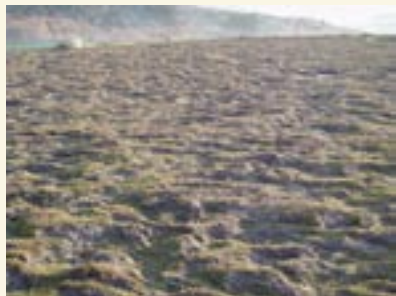


Heathland



Waved heath

In Scilly we have a special type of heathland called 'waved heath' where heathland exposed to high winds and salt spray from the sea, creates ripples. The wind and spray cause one side of the heather plant to die but this creates a sheltered side where heather can grow. If you look one way the heather will be green and alive, if you look the other way brown and dead.



Waved heath



A close up of Ling

Gorse

There are two types of gorse in Scilly; the taller and invasive European gorse and the smaller more delicate Western gorse. Gorse flowers smell like coconut and the two types of gorse flower at different times of the year. Western gorse tends to flower at the same time as heather. European gorse can grow to 2.5 metres tall. The leaves have rigid spines that help reduce water loss.

In the past gorse was used as a source of fuel. Its year round flowering gave rise to the saying that 'kissing's out of season when gorse is out of bloom' and Linnaeus is said to have fallen on his knees in admiration of the plant.

A close up of heather and western gorse

The most common plant to make up heathland are heathers and in Scilly we have Bell heather and Ling.



A close up of Bell heather; it has bell shaped flowers.



Gorse in bloom



Plants that you may also see are:

- Foxglove
- Red campion
- Broom
- Honeysuckle
- Ivy
- Common centaury
- Heath bedstraw
- Chamomile
- Pansies
- Woody nightshade
- Eyebright
- Tormentil
- St John's wort
- Birdsfoot trefoil
- Bluebells
- Woodsage
- Balm-leaved figwort



Bracken

Another plant very common to heathland but if it is not managed gradually takes over the landscape.



Foxgloves



Heath bedstraw



Common centaury



Pansies

Ferns

These can also be seen on heathland although difficult to identify.

Ferns can be distinguished from similar looking bracken as they tend to form a rosette shape. Look at the shape of the leaves and underneath you can find the spores which are arranged in different ways.



Chamomile

pink lousewort

A low creeping perennial. It is a semi-parasite on other plants and has bright pink flowers at the tip of its stems. These flowers have petals divided into two lobes with the upper one being longer. Its medicinal properties were for sheep and cattle where it was believed to rid them of lice.



Birdsfoot-trefoil and heather



Balm-leaved figwort



Broom

(Joke: Why is gorse a braver plant than broom? Because broom is spineless!) Resembles a spineless gorse and sometimes its flowers can be tinged with red. The flowers have no nectar yet when they are visited by bees, a trigger mechanism releases pollen as the bee alights. The dried branches were once tied together and used as a 'broom'.

Tormentil

During the Middle ages great attention was paid to the medicinal properties of wild flowers and the herbalists of the time gave them fanciful names to inform the public which to collect for specific ailments. The Tormentil is one such flower. It is a small, slender, low growing, creeping, downy perennial. It has four yellow petals on long stalks. Its name comes from the fact that it was once believed to cure the torment of stomach-ache. For more wild flower folklore please see the leaflet 'The uses and folklore of heathland plants'.



Thrift

Also called sea pink. It has a leafless stalk arising from the centre of a thick cushion of small fleshy, elongated leaves. Common on the cliffs near heathland. Thrift has to be able to withstand exposure to the elements and so gets a good foothold on bare rock surfaces by penetrating cracks with a long tap-root.

Milkwort

This plant has unstalked lance-shaped leaves with blue flowers on the top of the stem. The stamens are feathery and the plant was said to improve the milk yield of cattle.



Eyebright



Golden-hair lichen

A bright but easy to identify lichen. It is very rare so please do not pick.

Mammals

There are not many mammals in Scilly but you may see rabbits (some are black), rats and mice and if you are lucky a Scilly shrew. Mammals live all over the islands in many different habitats. Some can even be found on the uninhabited islands.

Lichens

Lichens are actually a combination of two plants, fungus and alga. The former produces fruit, the latter provides food.

Lichens can take many forms, some flat and encrusted on rocks, bark and gravestones, others more bushy are attached to branches, some on bare soil, among grass or heather. They absorb water through their surface and so are very sensitive to pollution, as they take many years to grow back and colonize bare rock.

The beard lichen grows on the ground and heather stems, reindeer moss can make the heathland look hoary grey in appearance. The management of heathland in Scilly is important to the survival of lichens.



Scilly shrew

Insects

Many different insects can be seen on the heathland. They can be very small but a couple of big easy to identify beetles are the Oil beetle and Minator beetle.

These can be seen wandering on short vegetation the Oil beetle is looking for solitary bee holes in which to lay its egg on a bee, so you may be lucky to see it with its head down a hole. When the egg hatches the larva eats the bee! The Minator beetle is a dung beetle - please mind your step!

Green tiger beetles

A carnivorous beetle that eats smaller insects with its powerful jaws. It can be seen flying across the top of heather in short flights making a distinct buzzing noise before crashing to the floor and then running very fast on its long legs. When mating the female carries the male piggy back style with its larva lying inside burrows waiting for prey.

Rose chafer

Found on thrift where the adults have an appetite for petals. They are metallic green in colour but in Scilly you can also get black coloured ones as well.

Grasshoppers and coneheads are very noisy but difficult to track down.



Minator beetle



Oil beetle



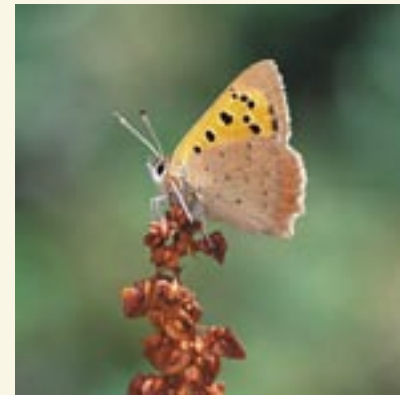
Rose chafer



Common blue butterfly



Ringlet butterfly



Orange-tip butterfly

Butterflies can be identified from their markings but may not settle for very long.

Butterflies

With their delicate and fragile bodies and wings they are capable of traveling long distances and are strong fliers. Their mouthpart is a long sucking tube (proboscis), which is coiled at rest. Life has four stages - egg, larva (caterpillar), pupa (chrysalis) and adult (imago).

Meadow brown: Look out for the 'eye spot' on the forewing - none, one or two? Different numbers of eyespots can be seen on different islands. The caterpillar is green and feeds on grass.

Speckled wood: Found along the edges of gorse thickets and has deep orange markings on the wing.

Small copper: Can produce two broods a year. Eggs laid on common sorrel.

Common blue: Small butterflies. Males blue, females dark brown in colour. Seldom fly very far.

Moths

Six spotted burnet: Has delta shaped wings with bright metallic black/red colours and clubbed antennae. A day flying moth that exudes a poisonous substance when attacked. Caterpillars are plump yellow with black spots

Cinnabar: Black and yellow/orange ringed colours of the caterpillars like a football jersey - poisonous. Feed on ragwort and heath groundsel. A common day flyer.



Garden tiger moth: The large 'woolly bear' caterpillars of this moth can be found near the grassland/heathland edges. The hairs can irritate humans. Adult moths have no proboscis and use their own energy reserves. Is a powerfully built moth that has warning colours of black/white forewings and red hind wings with black/blue markings.

Burnet moths



Scilly bee

There are many type of solitary bee (lives in a hole on its own) in Scilly including our own 'Scilly bee'.

Many birds can be seen on our heathlands. The main ones that you may encounter are:

Wrens

Gulls

Blackbirds

Dunnocks

Song Thrushes

Stonechats

Rock pipits

Starlings

Cuckoos

Linnets

Wheatears

Birds of prey



Rock pipit

Watch for its flight where it leaves its perch in a steep climb, then sings melodically with long trills as it parachutes back down to its perch ending in a slow 'chew-chew-chew'. Nests on the ground.

Wheatear

A restless bird with much bobbing and fanning of its tail. The wheatear's name means white-arse after the white markings under its tail. Its song is a short warble with a call note that is a harsh 'chuck-chuck'.



Song thrush

Stonechat

Its call sounds like two stones being hit together and gives this bird its name. They can be heard from the top of gorse bushes or rock carns being used as a perch. (Joke: Why did the bird smell a bit fishy? Because it was sat on a perch!) Nests low down in the gorse and bracken.



Stonechat - male

Wren

A small bird with a short upturned tail. It is a very active bird keeping to the undergrowth and foraging in a mouse-like fashion and is very noisy!



Blackbird - male

Blackbird

Often found frequenting the gorse thickets and with its orange beak and jet-black body the male blackbird is unmistakable. Albino males have been spotted in the islands. It has a flute like song with an alarm call a persistent 'pink-pink' and a scolding chatter when warning of intruders. Scilly blackbirds have a distinctive orange bill but no-one knows why.



Lesser black-backed gull

Please follow the Countryside Code:

- Be safe - plan ahead and follow any signs.
- Leave gates and property as you find them.
- Protect plants and animals and take your litter home.
- Keep dogs under close control.
- Consider other people.

Grazing livestock

The Trust grazes its land with hardy breeds of livestock:

- please do not touch or feed the animals.
- Make sure that the animals know that you are there.
- If an animal is startled do not run!
- Avoid getting between cows and their calves.
- Keep small children close to you.
- Do not leave bags or pushchairs unattended.
- Keep dogs under control.

For further information please see the leaflet 'Top tips for walking with livestock' or contact the Wildlife Trust.



Red Ruby Devon Cattle



Red Ruby Devon Cattle



Shetland pony cross



Dartmoor ponies

Archaeology

Scilly is renowned for its archaeological heritage, some of which can be found on heathlands. You will be able to find burial chambers and mounds. They may seem like a lump in the ground or a rock outcrop but get your eye in and you will spot them everywhere! (See 'An educational guide to the archaeology of Tean')



Burial Chambers



The Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust manages the heathland with a range of specialist equipment and this includes:

- Bracken rollers, brushcutters, chainsaw, quad bike, pedestrian tractor and tractor.
- Hand tools - bowsaws, loppers, pikes, slashers and scythes.

In brief, the heathland in Scilly is managed by breaking up large areas of bracken, bramble and gorse to create a more diverse range of plants. It is cut, rolled or burnt using a combination of machinery and hand tools.

These managed areas are then grazed. Animals are very good at removing nutrients from site and do a very different job to machines.

Caution

There is no lifeguard service operating

Beaches

Being an island Scilly is surrounded by water and the heathlands lead onto beaches. Please note that there is no lifeguard service in operation.



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