

# Friends of Baldock Greenspaces

## Helping Manage Woodland & Wetland

Established in 2004, we aim to conserve and enhance open spaces in Baldock by working in partnership with North Hertfordshire District Council and the Countryside Management Service. We involve local people in planning for and carrying out improvements to Baldock's open spaces.

We organise Sunday working parties monthly throughout the year. Work at Weston Hills has included coppicing and thinning in the woodland, path improvements, erecting bird boxes and clearing scrub to conserve the chalk grassland.

Anyone interested in joining the group should contact Phil Charsley on 01462 895665 or [phil@charsley.org.uk](mailto:phil@charsley.org.uk)

A walk through the woods

## How to get there



Produced by Fitzpatrick Woolmer Creative - 0800 130 3630

**By Road:** Weston Hills is located near the B197 London Road, Baldock. There is a small car park on Chalk Hills (signposted to Weston off London Road). Access from nearby housing is off Chiltern Road, Ivel Way and Limekiln Lane.

**By Public Transport:** The site is 1 mile (20 mins walk) from Baldock railway station. For travel details contact Intalink Traveline on 0871 200 2233 or [www.intalink.org.uk](http://www.intalink.org.uk)

Weston Hills Local Nature Reserve is owned by North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) and Hertfordshire County Council and managed by NHDC. The Council seeks to balance the need for sustainable development with protection of the environment. Contact us at:

[www.north-herts.gov.uk](http://www.north-herts.gov.uk)  
Tel: 01462 474000

The Countryside Management Service (CMS) works with communities in Hertfordshire to help them care for and enjoy the environment. For more information contact us at:  
[www.hertslink.org/CMS](http://www.hertslink.org/CMS) Tel: 01462 459395



# Weston Hills

BALDOCK



## Wild flowers and woodland on the chalk hills

# Local Nature Reserve



## Welcome to Weston Hills

Weston Hills is a Local Nature Reserve on the slopes above Baldock. It is home to rare chalk grassland and beech and ash woodland. Here you can search for wild flowers, seek out ancient earthworks and perhaps see some of the site's many wild birds, insects and other animals.

Many paths cross the site, some of them very steep. A surfaced path provides access along the lower slopes, although the ground is undulating and there are a few steps. Others are informal and may get wet and slippery. The map will help you find your way around. It also shows the location of information panels giving more detail about the site. We hope you enjoy your visit!

## What can you see?

There are wildflowers throughout the meadows. Tall white **ox-eye daisies**, the haze of **yellow rattle** and purple shades of **scabious** and **knapweed**. Look for anthills - home to **yellow meadow ants** and indicative of unploughed land.



On the steep slopes of Gibbet Hill in June you can search out several species of **orchid**, including **bee** and **pyramidal**. Find the pretty little heads of **quaking grass** and the tiny flowers of **eyebright** and **wild thyme**.



Many species of butterfly thrive here, including **common blue** and **ringlet**. On sunny summer days look out for the **marbled white** with its distinctive black and white checkerboard wing pattern. Not common in this area, it favours unfertilized grassland and has recently colonised here.



If you're very lucky you might spot a **slow worm** basking in the sun. As with all reptiles, these legless lizards are cold blooded so need the heat of the sun to get them going on a chilly morning.

The mosaic of grass and bushy 'scrub' provides warm, sheltered areas for wildlife along with food and places to nest. Look out for the **spindle bush**, its deep pink fruits opening to reveal bright orange seeds.



**Beech** trees in the woods produce stunning colours in the autumn and the crunch of their seed or 'mast' underfoot.

In spring and summer the hills come alive with birdsong. The familiar calls of residents, including **wren**, **song thrush** and **long-tailed tit**, are joined by summer migrants such as **chiffchaff** and **willow warbler**. The gentle purr of the increasingly rare **turtle dove**,



a migrant from southern Africa, has also been heard among the bushes.



**Buzzards** are regularly seen overhead. Listen out for their mewing cry. You may also see **kestrel** and the occasional **red kite**. At dusk you might hear **tawny owls**. The commonly known 'twit-twoo' is not one but two birds – a female and male calling to each other.



## History

The area is underlain by chalk, a soft calcareous rock which is visible in parts of the site. It has been quarried here since at least Roman times. There is evidence all over the site, including banks, trackways, pits and quarry faces, most now overgrown with trees and bushes.

Until the early 20th century, the thin chalky soils on the steeper slopes were grazed. This produced a grassland rich in wild flowers and associated wildlife. Pockets of this 'chalk grassland' can be found at Gibbet Hill.

Other parts of the site were cultivated but later abandoned and have developed into wildflower grassland and scrub. The southern end was planted with beech in the 1850s, with many being lost to the gales of 1990. New trees and shrubs have grown to fill the gaps.



## Management

In recent years the grassland has been mown annually to prevent the spread of too many bushes and help promote the wide range of species. Soon we will see livestock return to do this job the traditional way.

The woods are managed to ensure their long-term survival, with 'thinning' out of some so others can grow strong. Where possible, dead wood is left - it is great for insects and fungi. Coppicing along the woodland paths lets in the sun and creates a good habitat for plants, butterflies and birds.



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