**Sussex Wildlife Trust**

**Look out for...**

**Harebell**
A delicate looking flower which is actually extremely hardy, with the ability to grow in almost any location as long as it’s dry and grassy. It’s the county flower of Dumfriesshire, Yorkshire, and Antrim in Northern Ireland - where it’s called ‘the goblin’s thimble’. It’s association with magic doesn’t end there, as it’s also known as ‘witch’s bells’ and ‘old man’s bells’ - the old man being the Devil! Harebells can be found growing in small clumps on the Iron Age hillfort between July and September.

**Silver-spotted Skipper butterfly**
on Devil’s-bit Scabious

A relatively large black and white butterfly, unlikely to be mistaken for any other. They prefer pink and blue flowers such as Wild Marjoram, Field Scabious, thistles and knapweed - which is why they’ll be seen here in abundance during the summer months. In the evenings, adults can be seen roosting on grass stems.

**Dogs must be on leads when sheep are present. Please ensure you clean up after them as dog mess can cause lethal diseases in our livestock.**

**Listen out for...**

**Skylarks**
One of the most iconic sounds of the Downs in summer, the Skylark’s song is a long, unbroken bubbling warble. Sung by the male whilst hovering 50-100m high, you’ll often see them rising and falling. Despite what appears to be a healthy population here, Skylarks are on the Red List of threatened species, where changes in farming practices and the decline in habitat has led to a 90% decline in just 30 years.

**Grazing is important for chalk grassland restoration. It helps to reduce the nutrients in the soil left from agriculture, allowing more diverse species to grow and not be out-competed by vigorous grasses**

**Round-headed Rampion, or ‘Pride of Sussex’, grows almost exclusively on the chalk grassland of the South Downs.**

Look out for the deep-blue heads of our county flower from July.

**Take extra care when crossing the road that intersects the reserve, this can be very busy with blind corners and fast traffic - including cyclists.**

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**Grassland**
**Underhill Lane carpark**
**Stile**
**Water**
**Gate**
**Steps**
**Steps**
**Ditchling Beacon 248m**
**Bus stop**
**Ditchling Road**
**National Trust carpark**
**Ditchling Bostal**
**Central Brighton 6 miles**
**Lewes 6 miles**
**Stanmer Park 2 miles**
**Ditchling 1 mile**
**Steps**

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Ditching Beacon lies on the edge of Brighton and one mile from the village of Ditchling. Note: the National Trust car park is Pay & Display. A weekend bus service (79) runs from Brighton - see buses.co.uk. The nearest postcode is BN6 8ZB
Grid reference: TQ332129

Getting around...

Easiest access is from the National Trust car park at the top of the reserve, on the Ditchling to Brighton road, and a bridleway runs along the plateau. Part of the South Downs Way, this path stretches from Winchester to Eastbourne, and is popular with walkers, cyclists, horse riders and sometimes even runners who take on the 100 mile challenge. A path also leads to a small car park on Underhill Lane - these other paths are steep, slippery and have some stiles. The road through the reserve is too dangerous for walking.

The Marsh Fragrant-orchid (below) on the other hand is a much blower more colourful plant, dark pink in colour. It can be found on the northerly scarp slopes of the Beacon where moisture holds in the ground for longer. Related to the Fragrant Orchid, it can grow to 70cm tall and is best seen late June to August.

Sussex Wildlife Trust
Registered Charity No: 207005
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About the reserve...

The downland nature reserve of Ditchling Beacon is one of the highest points on the South Downs, commanding 360 degree views of the Weald and coastal strip. Located just south of the pretty village of Ditchling, the nature reserve is popular with picnickers and walkers alike, with the South Downs Way path and a number of other trails through the reserve.

Ditchling Beacon is an exceptionally fine example of the rare chalk grassland habitat found across the South Downs. However, it hasn’t always been the case, and over the past 70 years this nature reserve has lost up to 60% of its chalk grassland to trees and scrub. This was through historical declines in grazing and the increasingly busy Bostal Road cutting through the heart of the site.

Sussex Wildlife Trust took on the management of the nature reserve in 1976 and has spent the past 40 years reclaiming this challenging, north facing steep scarp slope. Many volunteer hours have been spent clearing the trees and scrub and traditional grazing methods have been introduced to manage the flower rich grassland.

In late summer, the deep blue/purple of Round-headed Rampion (above), the adopted flower of the Sussex South Downs, grows in abundance across the slopes. The beautiful fern-like moss Thuidium assimile carpets this area in places and Ditching Beacon is one of very few sites in Britain with a large population of these rare species. The flat plateau at the top of the reserve was ploughed up until the mid-1970s and, although coarse grasses still make up the majority of the grassland, Wild Marjoram, semi-parasitic Yellow Rattle and Common Spotted-orchid (above) grow in abundance.

The herb-rich chalk grassland provides valuable foodplants and nectar for a range of butterflies and insects including the Chalkhill Blue (below) and the uncommon Silver-spotted Skipper. In areas with exposed chalk, you could see the chalk carpet.