

Stanmore Country Park is a large nature reserve immediately north of Stanmore town centre. On warm summer weekends it is busy with walkers and visitors; on a frosty winter's day it can be deserted of people but loud with passing birds and foraging muntjak deer. The reserve is open all year round and welcomes all visitors. All that we ask of visitors is that you treat the site with respect – that includes not dropping litter, not picking flowers or fungi, not lighting fires, not damaging trees or fences, and keeping dogs under control.

The Common is managed by voluntary wardens who work to record species and enhance the site's biodiversity. Larger scale work, such as mechanical cutting of the open areas to prevent scrub growth, is performed by council contractors.

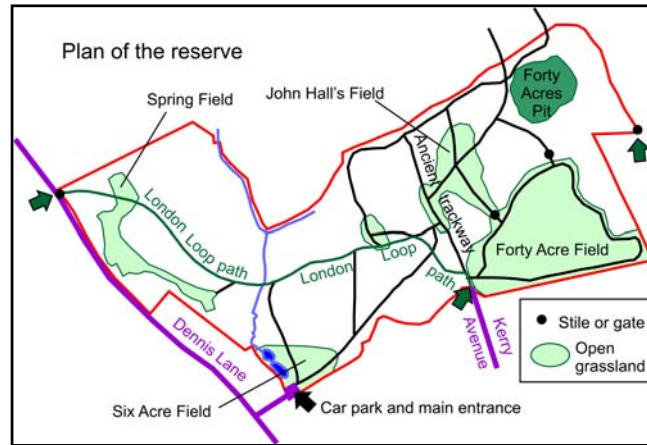
Natural History

Pebble Gravel at the north-western edge of the Park grades into a thin band of Eocene Claygate Beds to the south and east. As the Pebble Gravels and Claygate Beds drain freely, water washes nutrients out of the surface layers causing the soil to be acid.

Up to around 1950 the area comprised grazed open fields. Of these Six Acre, Spring, John Hall's and Forty Acre fields remain as open grassland. The remainder of the reserve is secondary woodland.

The acidic grassland community is dominated by common bent and Yorkshire fog. Damper areas are dominated by tussocks of tufted hair grass. Heath bedstraw, lesser stitchwort, red fescue, false oat-grass, tormentil and sheep's sorrel also occur here. Wild angelica and marsh thistle make up the taller elements of this community, whilst spikes of bugle and trailing stems of large birdsfoot trefoil bloom in a profusion of purple and yellow beneath. Remote, pendulous and wood sedges, marsh thistle and jointed rush can also be found. One of the more interesting plants to occur here is square stemmed St John's wort, an uncommon plant in London. Rough grassland is relatively rare in England,

especially in the SouthEast, and the open areas in Stanmore Country Park are therefore the most valuable in terms of biodiversity.



A striking feature of the grassland, particularly in John Hall's field, are the many raised nests of the Yellow Hill Ant *Lasius flavus*. Some of the less competitive herbs such as heath bedstraw, common tormentil, sheep's sorrel and lesser stitchwort thrive on their summits. In a number of locations the ant nest mounds march on into the woodland like overgrown gravestones, an indication that these areas were open grassland relatively recently. In our management of the Park we are working to clear these areas of the newly developed woodland, since seeds of the grassland plants are likely to be still viable in the soil, allowing rapid regeneration of the species-rich grassland. Around the edge of the open areas, particularly Forty Acre field, dog rose is magnificent for a brief few weeks in June.

Most of the woodland is formed largely of relatively young oak, birch and sycamore, with sporadic occurrences of rowan, holly, english elm, hawthorn and elder in the shrub layer. The wild service tree, which is relatively rare in London, is also found. Other areas of woodland are more open and contain mature beech, hornbeam and oak, with an understorey of holly, birch, elder and hawthorn. Hornbeam, in particular, is more characteristic of ancient woodland, so these sections



have probably been wooded for many centuries. Blackthorn (picture to left) with its savage thorns is common throughout the reserve, especially in wet areas along the streams and in Forty Acres pit. In April its white

flowers on the bare stems are an early promise of Spring; later it bears small bitter plums called sloes that can be used to flavour gin.

The woodland supports a good fern and bryophyte flora. On the drier woodland floor are shade tolerant plants including enchanter's nightshade, pignut, slender false-brome, herb robert and wood poa, whilst wood anemones generate a splash of white along woodland margins in the spring. Wood sorrel is rare within the site but can be found in the ground flora of the older woodland.

The ponds in Six Acre field are balancing ponds dug in the 1980s to protect the nearby underground car park from flooding. Plants to be found there include water plantain, reed mace, false-fox sedge, great willow herb, floating sweetgrass, soft rush, broad-leaved pondweed, pendulous sedge, and celery leaved buttercup. The pit further along in the woods is probably ancient gravel digging.

Forty Acres Pit

Forty Acres Pit in the northeast corner of the reserve is a mysterious ancient pond or reservoir. No historical records concerning this structure are known, although we suspect that it dates from the eighteenth century and formed part of the system supplying water to Canons, the home of the Duke of Chandos.

Birds

The birds spotted at Stanmore Country Park include buzzard, sparrowhawk, tawny owl, all three species of woodpecker, nuthatch and tree creeper. In summer several species of warbler are found including blackcap, whitethroat and lesser whitethroat. Also breeding are blackbird, song and mistle thrush, and many tit species including long tailed tit. Grey herons, moorhens and kingfishers can sometimes be seen feeding around the ponds.

Insects

Elm trees on Stanmore Country Park are home to the white letter hairstreak butterfly, a relatively rare insect that is a Harrow biodiversity flagship species. The brightly coloured burnet moth can be seen flying over the grassy open areas during the day. In fact there are two species: the narrow bordered five spot burnet, with five red spots on each wing, frequents Six Acre field, while the six spot burnet is found in Forty Acre Field. Over 240 species of "macro moth" have been recorded in the Park over the past few years.

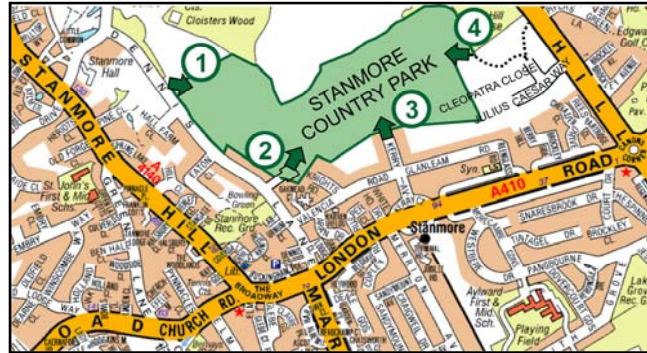


Narrow Bordered Five Spot Burnet Moth.

Image by Tim Munsey <www.wildphotolife.co.uk>. Reproduced by permission.

Mammals

Mammals recorded at the Country Park include fox, the occasional weasel as well as grey squirrels and rabbit. More unusually, badgers and roe deer have been recorded here from time to time and Muntjac deer can be spotted in the woodland shrubbery.



How to find the reserve

Entrance 1 on the map above is opposite number 51, Dennis Lane. Entrance 2 is the main entrance, with a small car park, but is not signposted from Dennis Lane: instead look for prominent sign "Burlington Park House, Private Road" with a warning about clamping. Entrance 3 is at the north end of Kerry Avenue, an easy walk from Stanmore Jubilee Line station. Entrance 4 is not open at the time of printing. Stanmore is served by the 142, 340 and H12 buses.

Contacts:

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Stanmore Country Park needs volunteers. If you would like to help, whether at one of our working parties or as part of the warden team, contact the warden or Harrow Nature Conservation Forum.

Stanmore Country Park

Find out more about your local nature reserve



Photograph by Marian Sartin

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