

## 15. The Heath Plateau - area 2

Ice Age sands and gravels underlie this part of the Heath, laid down as part of an outwash plain or 'sandur' during the Anglian glacial period. The sandy soils here are typically acidic and poor in nutrients.

There are many white flints in the topsoil, bleached by thousands of years of weathering on the land surface. This is a good place to find geological specimens.

You can find a variety of rock types in the shallow soils here - flints of all shapes, sizes and colours are commonest, but there are also many interesting 'erratics' brought to the area by the ice sheets, and also by pre-glacial rivers over 500,000 years ago.



1. View of the eastern part of Mousehold Heath in 1975, showing trees encroaching on the open heathland.



2. A tough, grey quartzite pebble from the Heath. This originated in the Triassic Bunter Beds of the Midlands, and was probably brought to Norfolk by a river in pre-glacial times.



Over the last century, this part of the Heath has become progressively covered by trees, mostly silver birch and oak. This means that the original landforms of the Heath cannot easily be seen, and heathland wildlife is crowded out by invading woodland; soils have become increasingly thick and nutrient-rich. The Conservators and Wardens are working together to restore as much of the open heath as possible. This means tackling the spread of trees and gorse scrub, and encouraging the re-growth of heathland plants by stripping the topsoil. There are three restoration areas on the Heath - this is Area 2.

3. Removing encroaching birch woodland and scrub, as part of heath restoration in Area 2 - autumn 2011.



4. A view north-east along Gurney Road, showing open heathland in Area 2, 1907.



5. Gorse or Furze *Ulex europaeus* is a vigorous shrub of dry, sandy soils. It can scatter its seed far and wide, and so tends to out-compete other heathland plants. In the past it was cut on the Heath for firing bread ovens.



6. Proof of successful heath restoration: a seedling of Common Heather or Ling *Calluna vulgaris* growing on newly open, disturbed ground in Area 2.



## Heathland species found on Mousehold

The Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists' Society has been recording the wildlife of Mousehold for many years, and has identified several interesting and notable species on the Heath.



7. The colourful leaf rosettes of a male Juniper Haircap Moss *Polytrichum juniperinum*. This is a native of dry, exposed, acidic soils.



8. The Red-banded Sand Wasp *Ammophila sabulosa* nest underground in open, sandy soils. It hunts caterpillars, which it paralyzes with a sting then buries with a single egg.



9. Bumblebee *Bombus lucorum* is a native of heaths and moors. A female is seen here feeding on Bell Heather *Erica cinerea*.



10. The Bell Heather or Purple Heather *Erica cinerea* tends to grow on dry, acidic soils.



11. The Thyme-Leaved Sandwort *Arenaria serpyllifolia* is a native of dry, sandy places.



12. The tiny weevil *Apion haematodes* is easily overlooked. It is associated with Sheep's Sorrel *Rumex acetosella*.



13. The Small Copper *Lycaena phlaeas* favours open, sunny habitat. Its caterpillars feed on Sheep's Sorrel; the adults feed on Heather and Yarrow.



14. Common Heather or Ling *Calluna vulgaris*, a characteristic heathland shrub which flowers in late summer.



15. The Heath Groundsel *Senecio sylvaticus* is found on disturbed ground and acidic, sandy soils.

## Photo credits

1. © Norfolk County Council / Historic Environment Service, 2.,3.,5,and 6. © Tim Holt-Wilson, 4. Courtesy Norfolk Heritage Centre, 7. © Robin Stevenson, 8. © Nick Owens, 9. © Nick Owens, 10. © Dave Riseborough, 11. © Stuart Read, 12. © [www.eakringbirds.com](http://www.eakringbirds.com), 13. © Peter Lindsley, 14. © Matt Berry, 15. © Aaron Woods.