

National Nature Reserve named 'Dragonfly Hotspot'

Thursley National Nature Reserve's unique wetland habitat has today been officially recognised as a 'Dragonfly Hotspot' by the British Dragonfly Society (BDS).

Dragonfly Hotspots are sites carefully chosen by the BDS as ideal places for dragonfly and damselfly species to live and thrive. They provide easy access for everyone to visit, and offer opportunities for the local community to learn and engage with the natural environment.

Thursley National Nature Reserve is a RAMSAR site of international importance for wetland wildlife, and has long been known as a haven for these beautiful insects, with 26 species of dragonfly and damselflies recorded on site.

The celebration, involving local partners, stakeholders, decision makers and Thursley's volunteers, was led by Natural England's Deputy Chairman Lord Blencathra.

Natural England's Deputy Chairman Lord Blencathra said:

It's fantastic to receive this badge of honour from the British Dragonfly Society. Recognition as a Dragonfly Hotspot will make Thursley an open secret, helping to put it on the map for the rich and varied wildlife that call it home, while opening up opportunities for people to engage and learn from it.

I would like to thank Natural England's Reserve Manager James Giles and Thursley's incredible volunteers for their work in creating the amazing boardwalk and Dragonfly Nature Trail which makes the wetland wildlife on this site accessible to all. I would encourage anyone with a love of nature to join them in supporting the wildlife on site and inspiring others to make a difference.

The 325-hectare reserve contains one of the largest remaining fragments of lowland heathland in Surrey, as well as peat bogs, ponds, pine and deciduous trees. These habitats are home to extensive wildlife, much of which is rare and confined to the heathland habitat and acid mire, including curlew, marsh clubmoss and the brilliant emerald dragonfly.

This unique wetland, less than an hour from London, can be accessed by a boardwalk, built with the help of Thursley's volunteers. The 1.3km easy access Dragonfly Nature Trail allows visitors to take in the landscape through vibrant interpretation and viewing areas including 3D etched panels for the visually impaired.

The centrepiece of the walk is a striking dragonfly sculpture designed by

local sculptors Lucy Quinnell and Adam Boydell on a former pylon which used to dominate the landscape.

The opening ceremony involved the unveiling of an information board created by the BDS and donated by the John Spedan Lewis Foundation, which will be installed at Pine Island in Thursley later this month. It was followed by a guided walk along the all-access Dragonfly Nature Trail.

Fiona McKenna, BDS Conservation Outreach Officer, said:

We are so excited to be designating Thursley as a Dragonfly Hotspot. It really is a haven for these insects thanks to the careful management by James and his team of volunteers.

It's a beautiful site and the staff and volunteers here are really keen to conserve their local dragonfly species. Together we hope to inspire even more people to get to know and love these fantastic insects and to get involved in monitoring them and creating places for them to live.

The British Dragonfly Society and Natural England will collaborate to run courses and walks at the new Hotspot each summer. During the winter months BDS will support volunteer work parties in managing the site to keep its dragonfly habitats in good condition.