

A Brief History of the Nature Reserve

The site of the current Windmill Farm Nature Reserve is steeped in history. Well before its occupation for arable and pastoral use by Neolithic and early Bronze Age settlers, it was used by nomadic hunter-gatherers of the Mesolithic period (c7000-4000BC), who left behind them traces of their existence, revealed when the site was excavated in 1982.

The present-day nature reserve contains the sites of two Bronze Age 'barrows', or burial mounds – several others are located within the general vicinity of the Lower Predannack Downs.

Approximately 50m south-west of the windmill tower sits one of the more unusual barrows in the country, topped, as it is, with a WWII Pillbox! (left)

During the Medieval period (c410-1540AD), the part of Predannack Downs that is now Windmill Farm, appears to have been associated with the important settlement of Trethvas.

The Lizard Windmill is reputed to have been built in about 1600, although the first recorded lease for the mill dates from 1755. It is believed to have been a working mill until the 1840s, serving as a farm store or livestock building thereafter.

Two Mark IX Spitfires of No. 165 Squadron RAF on standby at Predannack



In the Second World War, the current site of the nature reserve was incorporated into the RAF base at Predannack Airfield (1941-46).

During this time the windmill tower, being an obvious vantage point, was commandeered by the local Home Guard as an observation post (left). Evidence of the base's

wartime activities can still be seen within the bounds of the nature reserve in the shape of military buildings and defensive structures.

Windmill Farm lies within an Area of Great Scientific Value (AGSV), the Lizard itself being a part of the Cornwall Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The windmill tower is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and Grade 2 listed building.

CORNWALL WILDLIFE TRUST *and*
CORNWALL BIRD WATCHING & PRESERVATION SOCIETY

Windmill Farm Nature Reserve

Wildlife trail and
site guide



**Cornwall
Wildlife Trust**

Protecting Cornwall's wildlife and wild places

How to find the site

The Nature Reserve is 1 mile (1.6km) north of Lizard village.

Heading south on the Helston to Lizard village road (A3083) go past the turn to Mullion Cove and the turn to Trevelyan Holiday Homes. After the Trevelyan turn, continue along the road for 500m. Turn right onto a wide, long and straight section of rough tarmac road. Continue along this track for 500m until you reach the car park at the base of the old windmill.

It is recommended that visitors wear wellington boots all year round. Dogs are not allowed on the nature reserve.



Contact us

Cornwall Wildlife Trust
Five Acres, Allet, Truro TR4 9DJ
Tel: (01872) 273939 www.cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk

Cornwall Wildlife Trust

f CornwallWildlife **t** @CornwallNature

Further information:

Cornwall Bird Watching and Preservation Society
www.cbwps.org.uk

Linking the Lizard Countryside Partnership
www.the-lizard.org

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PHOTOGRAPHY: Sheila McCann-Downes, Tony Blunden, Adrian Langdon and CWT

Managing the land

The heathlands and associated pools are the most important habitats on the nature reserve due to their international designation as part of the Lizard Special Area of Conservation.

Most lowland heathlands have been created by a combination of climate, geology and, in particular, human activity dating back to prehistoric times. Lowland heathlands have long played an essential part in the economy of rural communities in Cornwall, providing extensive grazing and domestic fuel in the form of peat and furze (gorse), together with bracken for animal bedding and stone for building.

These uses declined in the twentieth century with the result that many of these rough-ground areas had become deserted and overgrown with bracken, dense heather, gorse and other scrub.



Grazing, scrub management and small scale controlled burning is vital to the health and rejuvenation of heathland. This type of management restricts the level of scrub invasion and creates a mosaic of ecological niches for plants and animals, ensuring the heathlands remain rich in wildlife.



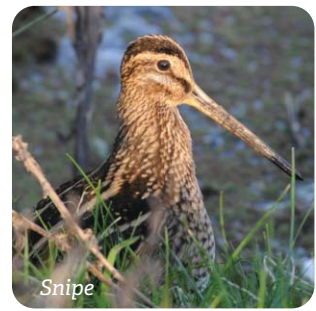
The heathlands at Windmill Farm are extra special in that Cornish heath is present – a species that only occurs on parts of the Lizard with underlying serpentine rock.

The pools and newly rediscovered ancient trackways are home to specialist rare plants such as



pygmy rush, pillwort, yellow centaury and three-lobed water-crowfoot. These species require the bare earth of wheel-rutted muddy tracks and gateways.

Ruan Pool is a nationally important pond for its botanical interest. Since 2001 a further 30 new ponds and scrapes have been created. As well as nurturing rare plants, these areas provide additional new habitats for birds and invertebrates. The nature reserve is now a key site for dragonflies.



When the nature reserve was bought in 2001 two thirds of the land was agriculturally improved dairy pasture. Since then the pastures have been managed in a variety of ways. There are now hay meadows, semi-improved pasture, winter bird food arable crops and heathland re-creation areas.

Welcome to Windmill Farm

Windmill Farm was purchased jointly by the Cornwall Bird Watching and Preservation Society and Cornwall Wildlife Trust in 2001. This 85ha (210 acre) farm is home to an array of habitats including wet and dry heaths, hay meadows, pasture, wetland, ponds and arable land. The mix of habitats means the site is home to a huge variety of plant, bird and invertebrate species.

This leaflet is designed to help visitors enjoy the site and includes helpful notes for those wishing to follow the Windmill Farm guided trail walks.

The paths are well defined across the nature reserve – and the routes are regularly punctuated with directional arrows – but **the ground is uneven, muddy and slippery in places, so suitable footwear should be worn.** Horseflies may be present in summer, so use of insect repellent is advised.

Regretfully, due to the protected status of some of the wildlife present, dogs are not allowed on the nature reserve.

Please be aware that cattle often roam on the site during the summer and autumn months. If you need to open a gate during your walk, please close it behind you.



What to look for

WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

1 ARABLE: Living bird table



than a thousand birds have been seen here in recent years.

The winter bird arable project consists of three fields covering an area of four hectares, a quarter of which is cultivated each year to provide a standing bird food crop for over-wintering birds. Look out for large flocks of feeding finches. Flocks of more

2 HEATHLAND RE-CREATION

This field was one of the last to be broken in and agriculturally improved. As such it was thought to be the most suitable for heathland re-creation. It took ten years of hay cutting to reduce the nutrients sufficiently before the first heather plants began to show.

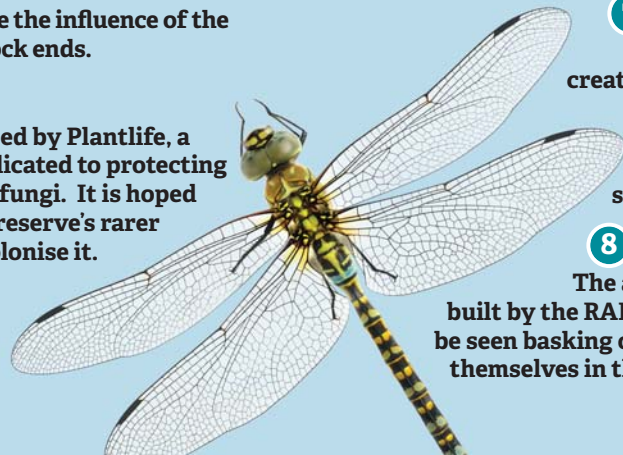


3 HEATHLAND

This is a good place to take a closer look at the heathland. As you walk through this compartment you'll notice the taller Cornish heath and black bog rush gives way to shorter common heather, indicating where the influence of the underlying serpentine rock ends.

4 THE PLANTLIFE POND

This pond has been funded by Plantlife, a charity organisation dedicated to protecting wild flowers, plants and fungi. It is hoped that some of the nature reserve's rarer plants will eventually colonise it. In the meantime it is providing excellent habitat for a variety of dragonfly species.



KEY TO SYMBOLS

- Information Centre
- Observation Hide
- Windmill
- Battle HQ
- Gunpost
- Hangar
- Generator
- Pillbox
- Nissen Hut
- Crew Hut
- Runway
- Air-raid Shelter

5 BOARDWALK

The boardwalk takes you through a lush area of wet woodland which is home to speckled wood butterflies, dragonflies, wrens and willow warblers. Otters also use the stream, their spraint has been found on the boardwalk itself. The heathland on your left is Lower Predannack Downs, currently managed by the National Trust.



7 DRAGONFLY PONDS

These ponds were specially created to provide warm and sheltered conditions for dragonflies and damselflies; 17 species are regularly recorded here, newts and rare stoneworts have also benefited.

8 OLD APPROACH ROAD

The approach road to the airfield was built by the RAF in the 1940s. Adders can sometimes be seen basking on its northern edge warming themselves in the spring sunshine.

9 ANCIENT TRACKWAYS

The tracks here were re-discovered after examining 1946 RAF aerial photographs. They were rescued from the encroaching scrub and re-dug down to the clay. The following summer saw the return of botanical rarities such as yellow century, pillwort and pygmy rush. These tracks are maintained in favourable condition by being driven on every 2-3 years to create the bare ground these species require.

10 11 12 RUAN POOL & BIRD HIDES

Ruan Pool is one of the UK's best ponds for its botanical interest. Bare mud around the pool's edge – created by cattle trampling – is important for some of its rarer plants. The pool has two bird hides; if you are visiting in the winter please only use the north hide, in the summer you can use the southern hide too.



13 HAY MEADOWS

Windmill Farm's hay meadows are cut for hay in late summer, once the plants have flowered and set seed. Since 2001 no artificial fertilizer has been added, this has allowed a greater number of finer grasses and wild flowers to gain a foot-hold. Of these three hay meadows the most northerly field produces the best display of flowers.

Follow the Nature Trail



Due to the likelihood of wet ground conditions, this trail is best suited to the summer months; at other times wellies are essential! Way-marked with red arrow signs, the route is approximately 3km in length.

From the car park head south to the gate and on into the arable fields 1. Follow the track through the centre of the field and take the first right turn which takes you through another field gate. This brings you into an area of hay meadow.

Turn left following the trail along the edge of the hay meadow. Keep going until you reach a large open field 2 then turn right following the fence line to your right all the way to a pedestrian gate which leads you into the heathland 3.

Crossing a short boardwalk, follow the trail towards the barbed wire fence, then diagonally through the heathland, along the line of the fire-break until it brings you to a rushy path next to the Plantlife Pond 4.

At the water's edge, turn left and make for the gate at the edge of the wooded area where a section of wooden boardwalk begins 5. Go left for Kynance Cove or right to continue the Nature trail.

Follow the boardwalk, almost to the end, where you reach a gate 6 then, leaving the woodland and onto the heathland, walk straight along the hedge-line for 50m.

At the double gates, turn left over the boardwalk bridge and proceed towards the dragonfly ponds 7. Here, the trail veers left between the ponds and on to a gate in the corner.

Pass through the gate and follow the boardwalk and path along the hedge-line until you reach the old approach road 8. Turn right onto the road and on until you reach a large metal gate.

To access Ruan Pool 10 and its two bird hides 11 & 12 head left across some pasture that blends into heathland.

To continue the trail, turn right through the pedestrian gate heading towards a tall concrete building. Turn left in front of the building along the hedge-line and through the pedestrian gate on your right into a hay meadow 13.

Turning left here will take you back along the track to the car park.

Follow the WW2 Trail



This trail – way-marked with blue arrow signs – is designed to reveal some of the military buildings that were once part of RAF Predannack, (see overleaf for more info). The route also serves as a short-cut to the dragonfly ponds 7, which are found at the approximate mid-way point of the Nature Trail.

From the car park, head toward the windmill, turn left once past the information centre and on to the gate. From here, make for the 'pill-box' to your right in the pasture field.

Continuing your line of travel from the gate will take you to another gate where the field meets heathland. Beyond the gate is a wooden boardwalk; after a short distance you'll see an observation hide that overlooks a wader scrape – take the left exit through another gate and follow the boardwalk to the double-gates. At this point, the trail merges with the nature route (see nature trail guide from 7 to 8 above), which leads you to the western edge of the reserve, where the old runway meets the MoD airfield currently used for training exercises by RNAS Culdrose.

Just before reaching the tarmac road, a well-preserved pill-box can be seen to your right, at the edge of a dense copse. Follow the road-side edge of these trees for about 100m, then take a sharp right to find battle HQ, an interesting bunker revealed following site-clearance work. A second pill-box can be investigated before looping back onto the road.

Across the road, a grassy lane leads to a crew-hut and ancillary out-buildings. Carrying on along the nature trail route brings you to the public footpath for Ruan Pool. Just beyond the 'Private – No Entrance' sign are the footprints of several aircraft hangars.

Heading back along the marked trail, following the hedge-line of the pasture field, brings you to a square-towered utility building known as the 'ready-steady hut', which housed the main back-up generator for the base.

Turn left at the tower to approach the first of two light anti-aircraft gunposts. The remains of the back-up generator sheds can be seen in the eastern corner of this field before re-joining the nature trail and following the pathway back to the car park.