



Justine Lloyd

# Gentleshaw Common

Land Management Team Co-ordinator Jeff Sim takes you on a tour of the Trust's newest nature reserve, Gentleshaw Common, on the southern edge of Cannock Chase.

## 1 Historic remains

Park in the roadside layby on Common Side opposite the Windmill Pub. This is the highest part of the Common with extensive views to the south and west. The windmill is thought to have been constructed in the early 1800's and part of it still visible.

## 2 Wildlife haven

From the layby take the track which heads downhill parallel to the roadside. As you follow the gently sloping track, you leave behind a small area of open mature woodland. The landscape then changes and the open feel of this large heathland nature reserve becomes apparent. The Common is one of the largest areas of lowland heath in Staffordshire, covering 86 hectares. Gentleshaw Common's status as one of the UK's best wildlife sites was reflected in its designation as a Site of Special Scientific Interest in 1981. Habitats like this with heather, bilberry,

cowberry and beautiful fine grasses such as wavy hair grass support a wide range of insect and bird life. Gentleshaw Common is one of an arc of heathlands in this part of Staffordshire stretching from Sutton Park on the horizon in front of you up to Cannock Chase. Ground-nesting birds such as stonechat, tree pipit and the night-time churring nightjar need habitats such as this to nest and rear their young.

## 3 Bogland beauty

The footpath heads in a southerly direction away from the road and down into an obvious valley. The habitat noticeably changes here as ground conditions are wetter. This area of wet heath is a really special place. Our main priority in this area is to reduce the dominance of the extensive patch of purple moor grass to give rarer wet heath plants such as bog asphodel, cross leaved heath, cranberry and sundew a chance to thrive.

## 4 Sandy habitat

Take the path heading to the west of the valley until you reach the electricity pylons. Then follow the path which contours around the slope here. You will notice the sandy cliffs of a disused sandstone quarry. In spring and summer these exposed sandy soils are home to countless solitary mining bees, rare and beautiful pollinators.

## 5 Conservation in action

From the quarry, head back up the hill back towards the layby. You'll see an area of birch scrub. Birch and bracken need to be controlled here or they will shade out the more delicate heathland plants and the rare heathland birds and reptiles would lose the habitat they need to live. Lichfield District Council has already carried out a large amount of scrub and bracken control, and the Trust will be carrying on this management to ensure the heathland plants have the best chance to thrive.

## Six to spot



Lizzie Willberforce

### Heather

There are three different species to spot: look for bell heather (above) and ling on the dry heath and cross leaved heath in the wet valley areas. Heather provides a great nectar source for bees.



Maragret Holland

### Fieldfare

Look for loose flocks of colourful fieldfare and redwing in winter searching for berries and other food in the heathland or along the scrubby edges.



Jon Hawkins

### Long tailed tit

Look out for flocks of long tailed tits foraging along the woodland edges. Flocks are usually related to each other, and they also roost together at night. They eat insects and sometimes seeds.



Jon Hawkins

### Fox

Look for foxes trotting along paths and in the woodland in the early morning. They are solitary animals, but during breeding season the male will support the female by bringing food for the family.



Gillian Day

### Red deer

Gentleshaw Common lies within an area that is well known for deer. As you travel to the reserve you may see deer at the woodland edges, especially in the early morning.



Amy Lewis

### Green woodpecker

These beautiful, shy birds are the largest of all the woodpeckers. They have a loud, laughing 'yaffle' call and their diet consists primarily of ants. They tend to feed on the ground.

## Gentleshaw Common



### Getting there

From Burntwood take Rugeley Road heading north. Turn right at the Redmore Inn onto Redmore Road and follow to the top of the hill. When you come to a crossroads, turn right and park on a layby a couple of hundred metres on the right.

### Useful information

The walk will take around 1 - 1½ hours. The track is unsurfaced and steep in places, with some flat areas.

So that we can protect the wildlife of this special place, we ask that you keep your dog close to you, preferably on a lead, especially between April 1 and June 30, when many birds are nesting.