

Stonehenge

Landscape and habitats

Sky

The big skies of this open landscape have formed both a key attraction and the backdrop to activities at Stonehenge from prehistory through to today.

The dark night skies are important for birds and insects, assisting their navigation and safe migration, whilst allowing us to appreciate our place amongst the countless stars.



Ancient and restored grasslands

Chalk grassland has a rich variety of wildflower species, which draw in a multitude of insects and birds.

Changes in land use have reduced the amount of chalk grassland in the UK to small isolated remnants. Here they survive on some barrows (burial mounds) and slopes that were too steep to plough. Recently, large areas of previously cropped fields have been restored by the National Trust to flower-rich chalk grassland. Grazing sheep and cattle keep the grasses under control and encourage wildflowers.

Here you can enjoy the pink flowers of the pyramidal orchid, sainfoin and the bright yellow of the horseshoe vetch. On sunny, south-facing slopes, common lizards and slow worms bask as butterflies and bees flit from flower to flower. Hares tear madly around the landscape in spring.

Woodland

The woodlands around Stonehenge have been planted for various purposes since the 18th century.

These include shelter for sheep and cattle, a source of fencing materials and firewood production. These plantations are a mixture of mainly ash, beech, yew and hazel and provide vital food and shelter for many birds and small mammals. Most of the woodland is dominated by ivy, bramble, wood avens and lords and ladies, which grow beneath the dense tree canopy.

The largest woodland area is at Fargo (3) to the west, where recent work has created woodland clearings around ancient barrows. These clearings have increased the woodland edge and allow more light to reach the woodland floor, encouraging a greater range of flowers to grow. You may hear the drumming of woodpeckers as they tap out their territories in spring, or see roe deer watching you from along the woodland edge.

Arable

Wheat, barley and other crops have formed part of the landscape for around 6,000 years and are an essential source of food production.

Before the advent of chemical fertilisers, thin, patchy crops supported a wide variety of wildflowers and the wildlife dependant on them. Today's efficient farming, with large fields of high yielding crops, can still make space for nature by including sympathetic management. This may include networks of unsown or grass margins, and unsown plots within fields. These provide a refuge for once common, but now rare wildflowers and important food and shelter for insects, mammals and birds.

Look out for the red poppies or the scarlet pimpernel along the field edges, and the brightly coloured yellowhammer sitting on fence posts and in the tops of bushes. Take a moment to listen for the melodic song of the skylark high above.

