

Nervous anticipation

Sarah Bunce looks forward to summer on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area, but the stakes are high! There are more than 30 heaths and heathland plantations, including Wildmoor Heath, Crowthorne Woods and Swinley Forest...

I always approach spring and summer on the heaths with a mixture of excitement and trepidation!

Excitement because there's so much to look forward to. The return of nightjars from Africa, tantalising glimpses of reptiles and an explosion of butterflies and dragonflies.

Trepidation because dry weather can bring wildfires. If we have another long, hot, dry summer, I'll be worried about seeing heathland fires in the headlines again, like the terrible incident at Chobham Common last year.

All the legal protection in the world won't stop accidents or acts of deliberate vandalism. Local planning departments can protect the heaths with a robust planning strategy, land managers can work hard keeping habitats in great condition and our wardens can ask everyone to give nature space. But it only takes one carelessly discarded cigarette, or one thoughtless BBQ, for all that work to go up in smoke. Wildlife will suffer, people will be put in danger and homes in jeopardy. It's with good reason that lighting fires is illegal, except in designated areas.

The heaths come alive in summer, as the different heathers start to bloom. My personal highlight is the end of July when huge swathes of common heather, or ling, come into flower, turning the heaths purple. It must surely be one of Nature's must see spectacles.

Heather is beautiful, but it's also highly flammable. To avoid more horrific incidents, we must all take this issue seriously and do our bit to prevent fires. Remember the code: **No BBQs or fires, ensure cigarettes are out and take all litter home. And if you see a fire, however small, report it via 999 immediately.** Never assume someone else has reported it. Your swift action could make all the difference...to people, wildlife and our local environment.

Enjoy the heaths, keep safe and please spread the word.

Thames Basin Heaths Partnership
www.tbhpartnership.org.uk

Look out for details of Heath Week, Saturday 24th to Friday 30th July 2021

