

Ham Hill Geology

Ham Hill Country Park is one of the most important geological locations in Somerset. The warm golden Hamstone, a Jurassic shelly limestone, has many special features and is one of the reasons for Ham Hill's exciting past and its current habitats. Hamstone is a limestone composed of crushed up fragments of shells and other sea creatures. The fossils found in the rock include ammonites, which date the stone to 170 million years ago - the Jurassic period. Hamstone is golden in colour, because of iron compounds present in the rock. Look out for beautiful crystals formed naturally in the cracks. Visit the stone circle to see if you can find any fossils and crystals, but please leave them where they are for other people to see.

There is access to several old quarry faces, which includes a Regionally Important Geological Site (RIGS) and a geological Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). These important designations ensure that the Hamstone is preserved for many years to come, and allows geologists and palaeontologists to study it. All the villages surrounding the hill are made from Hamstone, and it has been quarried for nearly 2000 years. The busiest time for quarrying on Ham Hill was 100 – 150 years ago in Victorian times – it would have been very noisy and dusty up here! The Hamstone is still quarried for use in local buildings and sculptures.

The Countryside Code

On your visit to Ham Hill, please follow the Countryside Code:

- Be safe, plan ahead and follow any signs
- Leave gates and property as you find them
- Protect plants and animals and take your litter home
- Keep dogs under close control and on a lead in fields of livestock.
Please clean up after your dog and use the dog waste bins provided
- Consider other people using the Country Park
- Please note: Ham Hill is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and on no account should any excavations be undertaken or metal detectors used—it is an offence to do so

Ham Hill wildlife

Ham Hill is home to a range of wildlife, from large creatures such as deer, badgers and foxes, birds of many different shapes and sizes, right down to butterflies, bees, spiders and ants! The nutrient poor, alkaline soils found across the

majority of the Country Park support a rare type of grassland (called calcareous grassland). The colours change throughout the summer as the yellows, purples and whites of the wildflowers bloom and fade. Butterflies and other insects are frequently seen on warmer, calmer days in this habitat, also attracted to the buddleia shrubs that grow on this more disturbed ground.

In the summer the traditionally managed hay meadows are alive with wildlife. Buttercups, vetches, orchids, cranesbill and many attractive grasses create a wonderful scene, whilst hundreds of insects buzz around them. The tall grasses and flowers of this habitat provide ideal areas for ground nesting birds, and there is a good population of skylarks in these meadows.

There are some wonderful woodlands to explore within the Country Park. In early spring, the woodland floors are a sea of yellow when the lesser celandines are the first flowers to emerge, closely followed by primroses, violets and then in April a carpet of bluebells.

Horses Wood is frequented by Greater Spotted woodpeckers due to the amount of dead trees left standing. This wood is situated in the wide, open area known as Witcombe Valley, which is grazed during the summer months to maintain a tussocky grassland habitat where buzzards can be seen by day, and owls by night. This grassland is also home to many green woodpeckers that feed off the many ants nests, and many fungi species thrive in the humid grass tussocks.

Walking along the scrub-edged paths from one area to another offers a chance to glimpse a variety of wildlife species, from the beautiful blackthorn blossom of spring, to the prehistoric looking bracken, and hedgerow plants of summer, followed by the browns and reds of Autumn.

As you walk along
you are likely to see
many small hedgerow
birds such as robins,
blackbirds and finches.

