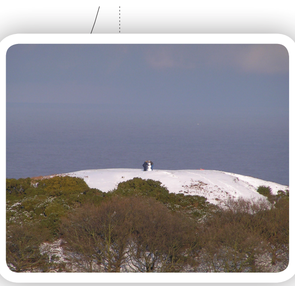
Muckleburgh Hill County Wildlife Site

Access

Welcome to **Muckleburgh Hill**. The whole of **Muckleburgh Hill** (55 acres) has open access to the public. The public is advised to keep a good distance from any works such as tree cutting or tractor swiping. Dogs must be kept under strict control and well away from livestock and should not be allowed to be a nuisance to other members of the public. Adders are present on the site.

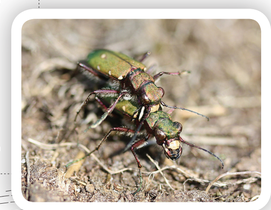
Management

Muckleburgh Hill is managed by Kelling Heath Trustees. In 2004 a management programme was started to restore the site to a better condition for wildlife. No management had been carried out for at least 50 years. Stock proof fencing is now in place around the central part of the site and is grazed by Highland Cattle. These animals are assisting in keeping parts of the area as open grass and heather by eating rough vegetation such as bramble, blackthorn and gorse and by trampling bracken. Tractor swiping is also being used to reduce the vigour of gorse and bracken, while retaining some areas for breeding birds. The more open nature of the site is already apparent with impressive vistas towards the coast. The perimeter zone outside the stock fencing is being managed to reduce scrub encroachment onto paths and to create open glades in the secondary oak woodland.

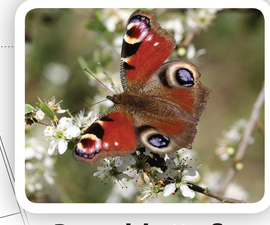


Muckleburgh Hill
January 2010

Mottled grasshopper
Myrmeleotettix maculata



Tiger beetles mating



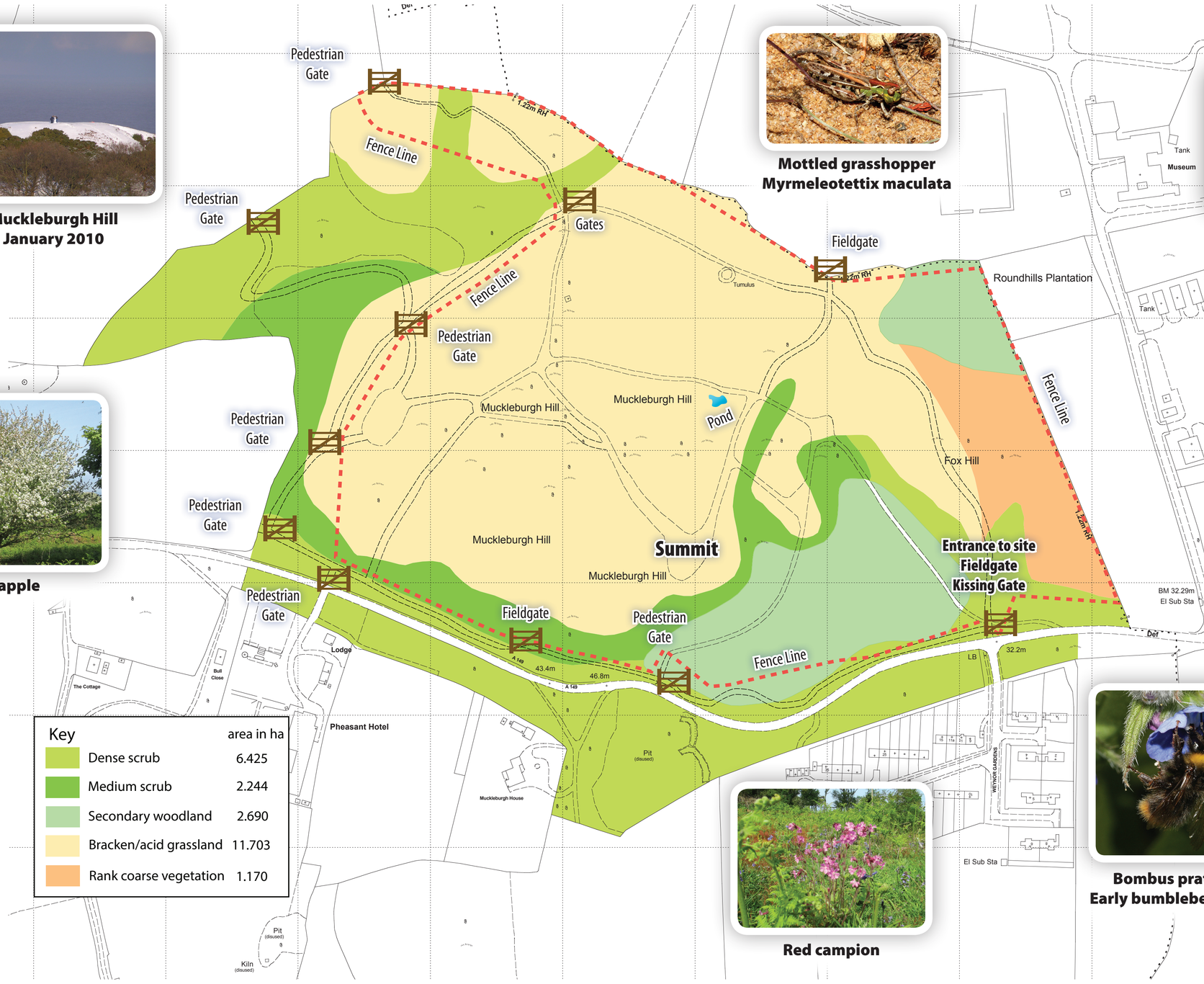
Peacock butterfly

Crab apple

Spider hunting wasp

Bombus pratorum
Early bumblebee worker

Red campion



History

470,000 – 425,000 years ago, the Anglian Glacial brought an ice cap which covered most of East Anglia as far south as the Thames Valley, diverting the River Thames southwards. The glaciers deposited boulder clay (till) which still covers much of the high ground in East Anglia and forms a major part of the soft cliffs from Weybourne eastwards. These deposits sit on top of earlier Ice Age deposits which in turn lie on the eroded surface of Cretaceous chalk. The white chalk can be seen at the base of Weybourne cliffs and also forms the wildlife rich chalk reef, now designated a Marine Conservation Zone, just offshore. The chalk is the origin of the flints which were used for tool making by Stone Age people. As the ice receded, a terminal moraine of gravels, sand and flints was formed, stretching for about 10 miles, and now known as the Cromer Ridge. A terminal moraine is the material scraped off the ground and pushed forward by an advancing glacier. As the ice melts and recedes the material is left behind in a ridge. Cromer Ridge is the highest ground in Norfolk, reaching 103m or 339 feet at Beacon Hill near West Runton.

375,000 – 340,000 years ago, the Wolstonian Glacial brought glaciers which are thought to have advanced as far as the Aylsham/Norwich line, but ice advance in East Norfolk was probably blocked by the Cromer Ridge. This glacial is thought to have produced **Muckleburgh Hill, Kelling Heath (Telegraph Hill) and Salthouse Heath** (slightly later) from glacial outwash, ie gravels and sands flushed out by melting ice, which extended the Cromer Ridge westwards. The steep northern slopes of Kelling Heath were formed by contact with the edge of a glacier.

10,000 years ago, the most recent glacial ended. The British Isles were still attached to mainland Europe by a land bridge allowing re-colonisation by animals and plants. Birch, willow and pine woodland developed. The first modern humans reached East Anglia soon afterwards and Mesolithic flint tools have been found on Kelling Heath. The Mesolithic period spans 10,000 – 5,500 years ago. These people probably hunted deer, cattle, elk and boar. At this stage the sea was at least 60 miles away from Kelling Heath to the north, beyond a wetland plain. However, sea levels steadily rose as the glaciers melted, and by about 6,500 years ago the land bridge with mainland Europe was covered by the rising sea, forming the English Channel. From about 5,500 years go Neolithic farmers began to clear Norfolk's woodland and grazed animals, probably creating the first heathland habitats.

Wildlife

Muckleburgh Hill is a County Wildlife Site. Heathland habitats support a rich and specialised fauna and flora but these are quickly lost unless actively managed. Common Heather and Bell Heather are able to grow on bare, quickly-draining sands and gravels. Gorse soon invades and is able to fix atmospheric nitrogen making the soil richer. Bracken grows in damper areas and helps to build up a layer of peat. This allows trees and shrubs such as Blackthorne, Hawthorn, Crab Apple, Scots Pine, Pedunculate Oak and Silver Birch to establish themselves. A mozaic of woodland, scrub, bracken, grassland and heather makes an ideal range of habitats for a diversity of wildlife.

Most of the site is acidic but there are alkaline (chalky) patches near the road which are revealed by the presence of Old-man's Beard, Spurge Laurel and Early Purple Orchids. Acidic areas are characterised by Tormentil, Wood Sage, Wavy Hair Grass, Pill Sedge, Heath Bedstraw, Red Campion and Heathers. Much of the ground is covered by mosses of the genus Polytrichum species, and Campylopus introflexus.

Butterflies include Grayling (bare stony ground), Wall (open areas), Small Copper (short turf with sorrell), Purple Hairstreak (oak canopy) and Green Hairstreak (gorse). Two bee species use only heather pollen: Heather Colletes and Heather Mining-bee. Ten species of bumblebee have been recorded. Spider-hunting wasps, Weevil Wasps and many other species make nest holes in the sandy pathways. Mottled Grasshopper, Speckled Bush-cricket and Slender Groundhopper are also present. Minotaur Beetles and Tiger Beetles are common.

Mammals include Hares, Rabbits, Moles, Roe Deer and Muntjac Deer. Characteristic birds include Redwing, Buzzard, Kestrel, Sparrowhawk, Hobby, Bullfinch, Song Thrush, Rook, Shelduck, Goldcrest, warblers and Yellowhammer.

Adders and common frogs are also present.

March 2017

NATURAL ENGLAND