



ENGLISH
NATURE

Kingley Vale

National Nature Reserve



working today
for nature tomorrow

Kingley Vale



"The largest yew forest in western Europe" Peter Wakely/English Nature

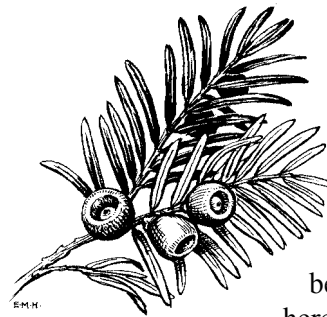
National Nature Reserve

This remarkable and beautiful reserve contains one of the finest yew forests in western Europe. Within it, is a grove of ancient yews which are among the oldest living things in Britain. The thin soils on the steep valley slopes support a rich downland turf with up to 50 species of flowering plants and grasses within a square metre. The reserve is one of the most important archaeological sites in southern England and has 14 scheduled ancient monuments, including Bronze Age burial mounds at the top of Bow Hill. From here, there are stunning panoramic views.



View south towards the coast. Jonathan Wray/English Nature

Yew forest



The largest yews occur at the foot of the valley. This species is very long-lived and research in 1996 suggested that these trees may have become established here in pre-Christian times. Their shapes are weird and fantastic, contorted by time and centuries of storms. From some of the huge limbs, partially severed and thrown to the ground by the force of the wind, new root systems have developed. The natural 'layering' of the yews, coupled with the smooth texture of the old bark, gives some trees the appearance of giant, motionless serpents. Certainly the yew grove at twilight is no place for the faint-hearted and it is little wonder that legends of hauntings abound!



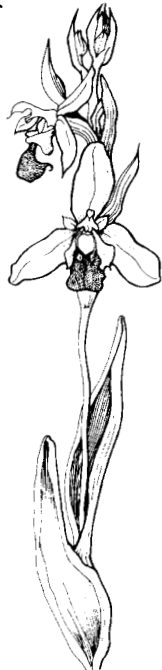
2000
years old?
Peter Wakely/
English Nature



Redwing
feeding on
berries.
James de
Bourneville

From here, the yews have progressively colonised the valley slopes. The reserve's woods also contain many other shrub and tree species, including ash, privet, blackthorn, hawthorn, dogwood and holly. Their berries and seeds provide food for winter flocks of thrushes - among which are visitors from mainland Europe like redwings and fieldfares - and for small mammals. Yew leaves and seeds can be highly poisonous but birds and shrews can eat the pulpy red fruits without ill effect.

Kingley Vale is a candidate Special Area of Conservation (SAC) under European wildlife legislation. This reflects its great importance in an international context and gives it the highest level of protection from development of any kind.



Fledgling
tawny owl. James
de Bourneville

Chalk downland & chalk heath

The downs of lowland England were used for thousands of years for raising sheep. This continuous pattern of grazing meant that a huge variety of low-growing, chalk loving plants could flourish, free from competition from more vigorous species which the sheep kept back. During and after the last war, most of this very rich and ancient turf was ploughed up and converted to growing crops. A few fragments escaped this process, those at Kingley Vale among them. Here, grazing still provides ideal conditions for plants like eyebright, wild thyme, rock rose and



many species of orchid, including common spotted, bee, fragrant, frog and twayblade.

Wild
parsnip
on upper
slope.
Peter
Wakely/
English
Nature



A Wealth of wildlife



Marbled whites
on knapweed.
Stephen Davis

Associated with the herbs and fine grasses is a huge number of invertebrates, including butterflies like marbled white, brown argus and chalkhill blue. None of these can survive on grassland which has been 'improved' for agriculture.

The plateau at the top of Bow Hill has a capping of clay overlying the chalk. This enables not just typical chalk downland plants to flourish but also species normally associated only with acid conditions, such as heathers and tormentil. This extremely uncommon soil type, which allows two plant communities, normally distinct and separate, to grow side by side, is called chalk heath.



View
from
plateau
of chalk
heath.
English
Nature



Of the 58 species of butterfly that breed in England, 39 have been recorded at Kingley Vale. Breeding birds have

included nightingale, grasshopper warbler, blackcap, marsh tit and green woodpecker, though the first two of these are now only occasionally seen. The plaintive mewing of buzzards is sometimes heard over the reserve. This species has certainly become more frequently encountered over the last 10 years. Other birds of prey to be observed are kestrel, sparrowhawk, hobby (in summer) and tawny owl. Of the mammals, the most significant in terms of their effect on the reserve's vegetation are rabbits and the herds of roe and fallow deer. Their grazing and browsing help to restrict invading tall grasses and scrub.

The Spirit of
Kingley Vale by
Walter Bailey



Young boar badger. James de Bourneville

On the negative side, the deer chew the bark of young yew trees and check their growth. Among other mammals found here are stoats, weasels, foxes, dormice and badgers.

Past, Present & Future

People have been associated with Kingley Vale since far beyond recorded history. On the summit of Bow Hill are the tombs of ancient chieftains of the tribes who lived here around 1000 BC. These 'barrows' are known locally as the Devil's humps. Elsewhere on the reserve, there are signs of Roman, Celtic and mediaeval settlements and cultivation. Canadian troops used the area for training during World War Two.

Kingley Vale was one of the first National Nature Reserves (NNR) in England, with different sections being formally 'declared' between 1952 and 1956.



Pyramidal orchid
D H Harvey



It was acquired for the nation through the efforts of Sir Arthur Tansley, the first Chairman of the Nature Conservancy. His memorial stone stands at the head of the Vale. The reserve was further extended in 1968. Most of the countryside around the NNR is now managed intensively for agriculture and is therefore very hostile to most forms of wildlife. Thanks to the care of English Nature and its predecessor bodies, the value of Kingley Vale has increased over the years, both as a wildlife oasis and as a relief for the human spirit from the uninspiring monocultures that surround it.



Fallow stag. James de Bourneville

The yew wood needs no management other than for public safety. The grassland is either grazed or mown to keep back the scrub and to allow the more delicate plants to thrive. English Nature staff also monitor the breeding birds and butterflies as part of national recording schemes and to help management decisions.



Wild thyme.
English Nature

Visiting

The main car park is near the village of West Stoke. The reserve is signposted from there and is about 15 minutes' walk along a footpath leading to the main entrance. Here, there is a small field centre with permanent displays and more information about the reserve. Near the centre, stands a sculpture carved from yew wood and representing 'The Spirit of Kingley Vale'. This was made by Walter Bailey in 1995.

Visitors are most welcome. We ask you only to keep to paths and rights of way within the reserve and to follow the Country Code. In particular, please keep dogs under close control, leave no litter and fasten gates after you. Neither camping nor fires are allowed. Mountain bikes and horses can cause severe damage to the turf and riders must keep to bridleways.

Kingley Vale is one of more than 200 National Nature Reserves in England. Most of these are managed by English Nature. As a Government body that cares for the natural heritage, we promote the conservation of wildlife and natural features through advice, research and grants. We work closely with others who share our aims. We encourage people to become actively involved in nature conservation and very much welcome volunteer assistance on our reserves.



For further information

Common blues on kidney vetch.
James de Bourneville



...about English Nature, this National Nature Reserve or how you can help with work here or on other reserves - contact

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Kingley Vale National Nature Reserve

NORTH TO
Petersfield

B2141

SOUTH TO
Chichester

From Ordnance Survey Landranger 197 "©Crown copyright. All rights reserved" Not to Scale

Kingley Vale NNR can be reached by

Bicycle: From Chichester train station. Contact West Sussex County Council (01243 753556) for a free copy of Cycle Chichester Route Map.

Car: The NNR is 5km north west of Chichester. Leave the A286 at Mid Lavant and continue west, past West Stoke, to the NNR car park.

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