

3 BLACKHALL ROCKS

Part of the Durham Coast SSSI and National Nature Reserve this coastal site combines superb geological exposures with internationally important grassland communities to produce a site with a unique character both in terms of biodiversity and landscape.



Limestone cliffs



Sea Spleenwort

Blackhall Rocks is a splendid natural exposure of reef-limestone. The 60-foot high cliff consists of 20 feet of glacial boulder clays, separated by a bed of gravel. Below this, the cliffs and the rocks exposed on the foreshore are a series of bedded algal-laminated calcareous dolomites forming part of the reef-top faces of the middle-magnesium limestone barrier reef. The caves at the southern end are the largest caves in Durham's Para-maritime magnesium limestone, which only occurs where the magnesian limestone outcrops at the coast.



Grass-of-parnassus

The combination of the unique geology and the maritime influence, have provided conditions where internationally unique grassland communities have evolved. These support a very rich flora, including species such as Quaking grass, Common Rock-rose, Salad Burnet and Bloody Cranes-bill. The wet gullies contain many locally rare plants, such as Butterwort, Round-leaved Wintergreen, Grass-of-parnassus, Brookweed and Bird's-eye Primrose. The slopes of Blue House Gill have areas of low growing scrub with privet and willows, providing breeding sites and shelter for birds. A locally rare fern, Sea Spleenwort grows in several places on the cliffs.

As the beaches become cleaner some salt-marsh species are colonising the shore. Offshore, little recording has been done, but four species of sea anemones have been noted.

The insect fauna is also of interest with 15 species of butterfly recorded, including the Northern Brown Argus butterfly and the Cistus Forester, a rare green moth, which breeds on cliff tops.

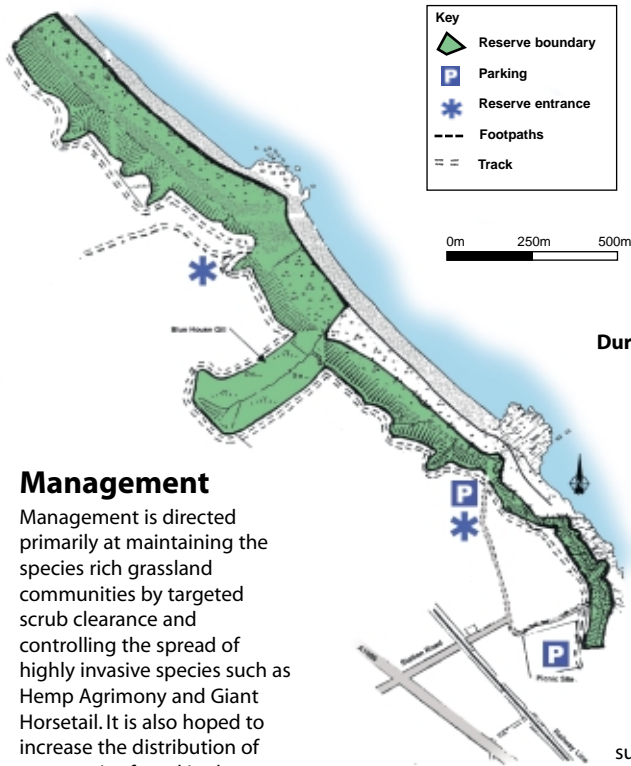


Burnet moth



Bloody Cranes-bill

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Management

Management is directed primarily at maintaining the species rich grassland communities by targeted scrub clearance and controlling the spread of highly invasive species such as Hemp Agrimony and Giant Horsetail. It is also hoped to increase the distribution of rare species found in the wet flushes by seed collection and translocating into suitable habitat. There are also plans to re-introduce Heather, Marsh Helleborine, Round-leaved Wintergreen and Common Juniper to the reserve. Survey and monitoring of the foreshore flora and fauna will also be undertaken in the future.

The reserve is managed in partnership with English Nature under the "Reserves Enhancement Scheme"

Cuckoo



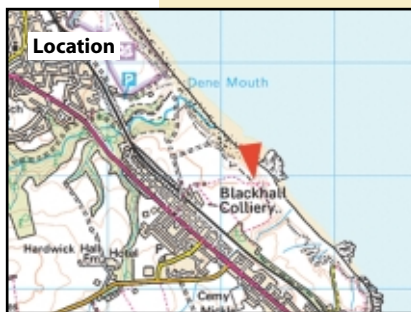
Durham's industrial legacy- the beaches at Blackhall are a result of a century of colliery spoil dumping from the undersea deep coalmines located on the East Durham Coastline. The intertidal substrates are now in the process of change as the tidal currents gradually remove this debris.



Colliery spoil beaches

Location

The reserve is located east of Blackhall Colliery. From the crossroads on the A1086 at Blackhall Rocks village, a minor road leads under a railway bridge and down towards the beach. A right fork leads to a large car park at the picnic site and the left fork takes you closer to the beach where there is limited parking for 3 cars and a series of information boards. The reserve can be accessed from this point with steep steps leading down to the beach or alternatively the coastal footpath runs along the cliff tops.



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General Information

Ownership: Leased from Durham County Council

Area: 32.4 hectares

Grid Reference: NZ470392

O.S. Explorer Map No: 308

Parking access to site: Parking at D.C.C. Picnic site or Deadmans Bank 1km east of Blackhall Rocks Village.

Public transport: Regular bus service to crossroads at junction of A1086, which is a half-mile walk to the reserve.

Dogs: Permitted on a lead.

Other: Please follow the countryside code.

Accessibility: ▲▲▲▲

This card is kindly sponsored by:



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