



Royal Birkdale Golf Club's Flora and Fauna

The Sefton Coast

Why are Royal Birkdale and the surrounding areas important wildlife sites?

The sand dunes of the Sefton Coast are the largest dune system in the UK at over 2,000 hectares.

Royal Birkdale comprises almost 5% of this unique resource, and 80% of the course is available for nature as out-of-play areas. The natural value of the course and the surrounding dune coast areas have been recognized by local, national and international nature conservation designations, including:

- **Ramsar** - internationally important wetland
- **Candidate Special Area of Conservation** - European nature designation contributing to the NATURA 2000 SERIES
- **Special Protection Area** - European nature designation under the Wild Birds Directive contributing to the NATURA 2000 SERIES
- **Site of Special Scientific Interest Local Nature Reserve** - Birkdale Sand hills

Royal Birkdale Golf Course is just one part of the Southport Sand Dunes and Foreshore Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in which there is a wide variety of wildlife interest.

The Dunes also provide an opportunity for human contact with nature, with an estimated 500,000 people visiting the coast each year.

We will endeavour in this short article to give visitors a good understanding of how the Golf Club gears its activities in maintaining the course, bearing in mind the important status of SSSI.

The club works closely with many agencies to maintain the importance of the environment and hopefully improve the quality of wildlife (Read later about the club's own initiatives).

We will start with a summary of subjects to be read.

Flora (Plants of the region); **Fauna** (Butterfly, Moths, Dragonflies, Insects, Sand Lizards, Water Vole, Red Squirrels, Natterjack Toads, Great Crested Newts and the large number of species of Birds to be seen).

To play golf at Royal Birkdale is to play through a landscape teeming with wildlife, which is not always obvious. Hopefully this guide will give you a greater understanding of what's happening around you, without detracting from your enjoyment of your golf.

Flora

Our most important plants are the Petalwort (a liverwort) on the course, the Dune Hellebore Orchid, and the only location in England of the Baltic Rush. As you walk around you will see large numbers of plants.

The most obvious one is the Evening Primrose, a large plant with yellow flowers in profusion.

Look out for a number of Pea related plants. The Common Vetch has small pink flowers.

The Gorse (from the Pea Family also) has at the right time of the year a display of yellow flowers that can not be ignored (what a great scent).

The small bushes that occupy the higher ground of the dunes are havens for our bird life.

The trees, which include lovely specimens of Pine, are occupied by our wintering Crossbills, and a resting place for the Scandinavian Fieldfare and Redwings, at times well over 100.

Buckthorn is quite a common shrub-bush having nasty spiky leaves and orange berries fading to a washed yellowy cream. When food is getting short a limited number of Thrush type bird species (Fieldfare, Red Wing and Mistle Thrush) will suffer the bitter berries.

Fauna

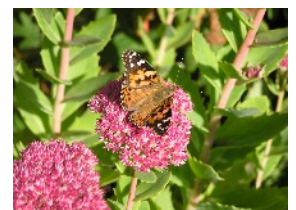
Butterflies

Many species of Butterfly exist on the varied habit of the course.

Many have reliance on their own particular plant-flora.

For example Small Tortoiseshell like laying eggs on nettles, so keep a corner of the garden with a patch of varied flowers and common weeds!! Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown like the grassy weedy areas.

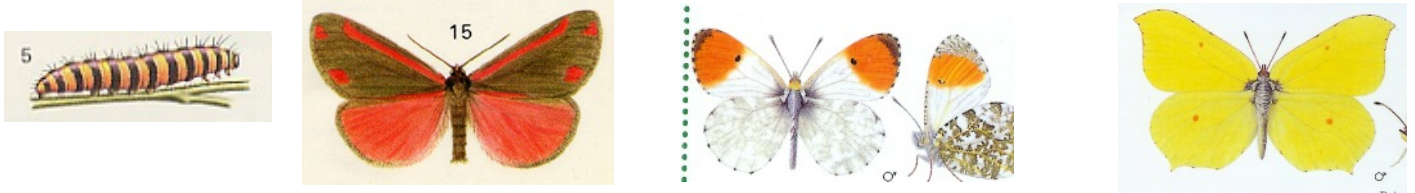
Painted Lady



Brimstone's with their sulphur Yellow wings. Orange Tip with half white and half orange wings.

We have the Speckled Wood swooping in shaded woodland, and Copper, Holly Blue, Small Common Blue butterfly in flat scrub land all with attractive markings. **Painted Lady** and red Admirals are migratory, and come into the UK, after hatching in 1,000's. They attempt breeding in the U.K. , and by mid August some are flying around. With the change in our weather we may see more success.

Moths



The common Cinnabar moth is very colourful reddish fawn, its caterpillars, feed on the Rag wort plants, and are striped yellow and black. They are rather a nasty taste, the caterpillars' colouring reminds predators of the nasty taste.

A quite common caterpillar is rather large (5-6 cm.) blackish and very hairy, seen for many months, probably the Garden Tiger moth.



An insect which is also common at the right time of year, is the Six Spot Burnet, overall red waxy appearance with each upper wing having spots.

Dragonflies

The shallow pool in the centre of the dune slack between the 3rd and 6th holes attracts dragonflies such as the Ruddy Darter.

Mature male Ruddy Darters are bright crimson while immature males and females are pale ochre. Both can be distinguished by their characteristic bouncing, swinging flight.

The large pond on the 5th hole supports a population of southern Hawker dragonflies. These can be seen resting by the pond but can also be spotted high above the pine trees to the left of this hole, trying to attract a mate.

Southern Hawkers are much larger and more conspicuous than the small Ruddy Darter: male Southern Hawkers have vibrant blue, green and black markings, while the female is stouter with more subtle green, black and yellow markings. The male Southern Hawker also has a distinctive flight, circling around following a regular path, and they will deliberately fly close to human observers.

Sand Lizard



Sand Lizards are protected. It is illegal to deliberately disturb, capture, injure or kill a sand lizard, or to damage or destroy breeding sites or resting places.

This means that the green staff at Royal Birkdale have to adapt their methods and the timing of their operations to avoid them.

During The Open, even operations as simple as changing the hole location require a quick check to see if a Sand Lizard has got stuck in the cup.

Sand Lizards are difficult to spot as they are well camouflaged within the dune land vegetation. They spend a lot of time underground, either in burrows dug by the lizard or in vacant mammal burrows, where they often form small colonies and where they hibernate in winter. Eggs are also laid underground. They are most easily seen when basking in open sand on sunny, south facing banks and paths.

They are cold blooded and must regulate their temperature by alternatively seeking sun and shade and, as such, need both open sand for sun bathing and tall vegetation for shade. Sand Lizards are generally 18 to 20 cm in length.

Water Vole



Ann Lowe a member took this fantastic picture a rare sighting of a Water Vole. It seems to be smiling, as it sits at its burrow entrance, which was on the left hand side of the sixth fairway as you approach the green.

Ann has taken some stunning pictures of our wildlife, which appear on later pages, covering many species of Flora and Fauna

Red Squirrels

Red squirrels are our only native squirrel. They are very shy and spend much of their time high in the trees. Their presence can be confirmed by the chewed pine cones which they let fall to the ground and by the large drays, or nests, which they build in the forks of trees. You may even be lucky enough to hear a distinctive ‘chuk-chuk’ noise if one is close by.

The population and distribution of red squirrels has declined across all areas of the UK, due mainly to habitat loss, the competitive ability of the grey squirrels and the introduction of a viral disease by greys. The squirrels breed mainly further south in the Formby Woods, and their numbers are improving.

Grasshoppers

The 7th hole is a par 3 which plays across a gently undulating grassland. The characteristic grating sound of the common field grasshopper can be heard here, and across the grasslands at Royal Birkdale, and they can often be seen sunning themselves on bare patches of ground.

This large grasshopper varies in colour and individuals may be green, brown or purple and can be mottled with black, brown or grey. Mature adults have an orange tip on their abdomen and this helps distinguish them from other grasshoppers. Unlike other grasshoppers, this species is a strong flier.

Weasel and Stoat

Both are quite frequently seen hunting, for small mammals including Rabbits, any where on the course.

Foxes

Foxes are regularly seen, but they may spend some time in nearby built up areas.

Natterjack Toads



The Natterjack are quite rare, and they have competition from the Common Toad, which breed in greater numbers. Some years the paths are over run by tiny Common Toads.

Special conservation of opening up small suitable pools, is taken by the club’s green staff to help nurture breeding success. The female is much larger than the male.

Common Toads

The picture clearly shows the lack of back stripe and appears less knobbly on the back, colour can vary.

Great Crested Newt One of two species to be seen, the other being **The Smooth Newt**, which has no crest on its back.



Ornithology

Birds



Whilst playing your round of golf what might you see?

You could be lucky and see one of our most attractive species.

The Stonechat, having bred on the course this year after the last recorded breeding being over 10 years ago. They breed at Hillside Golf Club, Formby Golf Club also, where the terrain is more heath land and suitable for this species.



In the last few years we have had a large population of Crossbills visiting the course, soon after breeding in local Pine Woods (30 to 60 after breeding have been seen).

Crossbills are known as an irruptive species. If their food source, pine kernels are produced in abundance, they breed profusely.

It is possible that the wet winters and sunny summers have had an impact on food production.



Another special bird with its beautiful colours is the Goldfinch

The British favourite, the Robin, is seen in scrub-gardens any where near humans, sitting on the end of your fork whilst you have a cup of tea.



We have many species of birds worth looking out for, some are listed below.



A Little Owl breeding in Farmland scarce visitor.



Heron possibly from Ince Blundell largest Heronry located in NW



Siskin which breed and visit our course as wintering visitors.

On the next page we have produced a Table of Resident, Migratory and Passage -Wintering birds. Species in groups, showing species status, recognition, call, location to help you identify species

The best order of identifying is; 1 by CALL - 2 by FLIGHT - 3 COLOURING - 4 LOCATION?

If you learn Bird calls and flight, then you are already 80% sure, and when the colouring becomes visible 95% sure 1 =70% 2 =+10% 3 =+15% 4 =+5%

If you are new to Ornithology, you may find it quicker if you get close enough to view flight and colouring. If you do guess the bird try and listen to its song there and then, after 2 or 3 attempts you will know the bird before it appears.

A good bird book giving all the details, will speed up your skills.

Don't forget the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and The British Trust for Ornithology are the main Bird organisations, but there are many local wildlife trusts that you can visit-join, that do exceptional work.

List of Birds other than very common species, that may be seen on the course

I have produced a table showing our main species, indicating whether they are *m-migratory*, *r-resident*, *p-passage*, *w-wintering*. Very common birds like Crows, Magpies, Blackbirds will not be covered in detail. Which hopefully gives you a sense of the magnificent wildlife to be seen. Don't be disappointed if you only get fleeting glimpses of nature as the terrain helps to keep them safe. Below is our list of birds of interest and important species who use the course to breed.

Species	Status	Recognition	Call	To seen
Finches				
Chaffinch	R-Common	Brown-Grey, Male pale orange Breast	2-3 notes+final one	Woodland –Bushes 1-18
Green finch	R-Common	Green- Yellow -Female more fawns	single repeated note	Woodlands 1-18
Goldfinch	R-Common	Green-Yellow-Red, Erratic flight in flocks	Tinkering set of notes	Seed eating- small-med Trees
Siskin	R-Fairly	Green-Yellow Fawns, as above	Wheezy, also above	Seed eating- pine trees
Brambling	RW- few year	Brown-White Reddish	Similar to Chaffinch	Woodlands-Bushes
Twite	RW- few year	Brown-fawn Male pinkish rump	Metallic “tweeh”	Open flat near sea
Linnets	R-Fairly	Greyish head-Male reddish breast	Undulating- “tsweet”	
Bullfinch	R-Fairly	Male:orange breast, Female: fawn	Soft melancholy‘peu-peu’	Woodlands Orchards Parkland
Tits				
Blue Tits	R-Common	Blue-Black-Yellow	Varied common “zee”	Woods, Gardens
Great Tits	R-Common	Same Striking Blackcap	Varied “zee-de”	As above
Coal Tits	R-Fewer	Black-Yellow-White Cap		
Long-tailed	R-Fewer	Attractive Pink- Black-white L Tail	Repeated “tsimp”	Undergrowth-thickets-gardens
Pipits				
Meadow Pipit	M-Common	Brown-White-striped feathering	Thin “zeep”	Flat grassy-seed fairways
Tree Pipit	M-Fairly	Pink legs, no striping upper rump	Coarse “teezee”	above with small trees
Bunting				
Reed Bunting	R- Fairly	Male in summer Black head+white collar	Song “chi-chi-chitty”	Reed Beds and wet areas
Regretfully no		Yellow Hammers or Corn Bunting		
Warblers and their allies				
Grasshopper	M-Fairly	Striped olive brown under, Eye stripe	High pitched “Trilling”	Open with vegetation mounds
Sedge	M-Fairly	Striped upper side, whitish eye stripe	Song very varied in air	Reed beds, marshy swampy
Garden	M-Fairly	Brown upper side-greyish white under	Musical, mellow, liquid	Open Woods , Undergrowth
Blackcap	MW-Common	Female brown cap, fawn , white under	Above but less mellow	Quite difficult to spot in above
Whitethroat	MV-Common	Greyish head male, brown back	Song from perch-flight	Bushes on side-top sand hills
Lesser Whitethroat	M - Scarce	Greyish head and back, dark ear covet	Sings from hedgerow	As above, bred 2016
Willow	M-Fairly	Plain greenish above no wing bars	Descending warble	All types of woodland -undergrowth
Goldcrest	R-Fairly	Smallest bird, black yellow stripe	High pitched “tweet”	Coniferous-mixed woods-bushes
Wood Warbler	RP-Scarce	Bright yellow throat, stripes wing yellow	Liquid “diu” Song “sip”	Mature deciduous woods. Yorkshire??
Chiff Chaff	M-Fairly	Darker than Willow W fawn, greenish	Repeating “chiff-chaff”	Tall trees , thickets, parks
Wheatear’s and others				
Wheatear	MP-Fairly	Tail black tip M steel grey back,Fawn	Call “tack”, bobbing tail	On fairways in passage to moors
Whinchat	MP-Scarce	Smaller and varied feather colouring	Song high pitched warble	As above
Stonechat	R-Fairly	Most handsome on course see photo	Call short “tek” notes	Open heath-grassland
Robin	R-Common	Known as the UK most popular bird	Song, high pitched warble	Open scrub land and Gardens
Redstart	MP-Scarce	Male black bib and red chest grey back	Call “tic tic”	Commons, parks, woods, inland
Thrushes				
Common Thrush	R-Scarce	Not as common as in the past 20 years	Well known short”seep”	Woodlands, Parks, Gardens
Blackbird	R-Common	Very common in most habitats	More musical and warble	As above
Mistle Thrush	R-Fairly	Heavily spotted , white under wing	Similar but flute like	Mature woods and edge
Fieldfare	W-fairly	Grey top head Fawn-greyish back	Call “schack schack”	White under wing
Redwing	W-Fairly	Slightly smaller Brown Eye stripe white	Call “zeeup”, song flautist	Red flanks under
Ring Ouzel	MP-Scarce	White crescent shaped breast band,black	Song “tew tew tew”	Known as the Upland Blackbird
Other odds				
Pied Wagtail	R- Fairly	Black with white bibs, long tails striped w	Call “tsweep” song twitter	Farms, Buildings, Rocky
Grey Wagtail	RW-Fairly	Yellow underside and grey back , long tail	As above Song seldom	Moorland, rivers, lakes
Yellow Wagtail	M-VScarce	Very rare now All yellow with darker wings	As above	Was not uncommon in Hesketh Bank
Swallows	M-Fairly	Very regular at RBGC nesting same huts	Song long and twittering	Cultivated open , mud nests in Huts
Crossbills	RW-Fairly	Have become more regular 30-60 over 2 yrs	Call “kip-kip-kip”	Male Orange, Female Green breasts
Spotted Flycatcher	MP-Scarce	Male Black head and back, white under	Call short “wit”	Open woodland and parks
Dunnoek	R-Common	Brown streaks, grey face breast (Accentor)	Liquid, call like Robin??	Gardens, Parks, low bushes

On the this page we will finish with **Birds of Prey and Owls**, there are still some common birds such as **Crows, Jackdaws, Pheasants, Partridges, Black Birds, Starlings**, and some rare birds of passage; **Marsh Harrier, Osprey** etc. not included.

Species	Status	Recognition	Call	To be seen
Birds of Prey				
Kestrel	R-Fairly	Breeds on course Red-Brown hovers prey	Call series of “keh-leek”	Found any where on course for prey
Sparrow hawk	R-Fairly	Dark grey back, striped chest	Call at nest “leek-keh-leek	Breeds in larger woodlands gardens
Buzzard	R-Fairly	Plumage can vary, brown -blackish-crème	Call high pitched mewing	Woodlands with surrounding fields
Merlin	MP-Fairly	Male has bluish back, speckled chest	Call like Kestrel”ki-ki-ki”	Nesting on moors and tree-less hills
Hobby	MP-Fairly	Moustachial streak and narrow wings	Call “kick-kick”	Open woodlands and heaths-open
Peregrine	RP-Scarce	Dark upper side and light underside Fast!!!	Seen occasionally passing	Breeds mainly in cliffs or building
Owls				
Barn Owl	R-Scarce	Fawn, light chest, famous heart shape head	Wheezy cry and shriek	Farm type buildings, open field
Tawny	R-Fairly	Beige-light brown, enclosed ears	Deep hooting and”kuvvitt”	Tree holes or Boxes in woods
Long- Eared	R-Scarcer	Slightly darker brown with ears that stick up	Quite silent, hoots by nest	Mixed woodlands
Short-Eared	RW-Scarce	Wings swooping over ground any time	No sound	Plantations on moorland
Little Owl	R-Scarce	9” only seen on course although breeds local	Shrill and sharp	Farmland feeds on worms-insects

We have not included Shore side Birds, passing overhead, some species are however interesting.

We have had a Cattle Egret flying around one of our pools. Oystercatchers regularly pass over head on way inland where they often nest, any time during 24 hours is not unusual.

Pink-footed Geese(20-30,000) arrive in late September and leave mid-late March returning to Greenland

A few Black Headed Gulls sometimes roost overnight, not too successively as we regularly find feathers from Black Headed Gulls.

Could be evening visits by Sparrow Hawks, Foxes, or even Buzzards, I don’t know?

To complete the page we are including some photos relating to R.B.G.C. Wildlife.



Our Barn Owl at the box erected by the club.



Why the Robin is the best known bird in UK.



This is a picture of a Mistle Thrush suffering from Leucistic.

This is a half way stage between an Albino condition (White colouring with pink eyes) and a Melanistic condition (The pigment black over rides all colours)

This Thrush’s Melanistic in-balance has resulted in too little black being produced to get the normal colour of the thrush in its feathers. Quite a rare condition.

This Mistle Thrush lived with us for over 18 months

Hope you found this article both helpful and informative and it will be useful if you visit the Birkdale Sand Hill Reserve area or Royal Birkdale Golf Club, where the green staff take a keen interest in the welfare of the environment.

Brian Randall October 2016