

Key species in Bexley

Bexley is home to a huge number of different plants and animals. Some of these are rare or declining, and Bexley's populations of them are of regional or national importance. A species does not have to be rare or threatened to be interesting and important. They may have strong cultural significance, or simply look or sound beautiful.

Bats

Bats are fascinating and unique animals, the only true flying mammals. At least nine of the 16 species of bat in the UK have been recorded in Bexley. All of Britain's bats have suffered serious declines during the past century, mainly due to loss of roosting sites and declines in insect numbers and diversity. All bats are protected under UK and European Union law. Places which provide good foraging habitat are very important to bats, as are roosting and breeding sites.

Black poplar

The native black poplar (or water poplar) is a scarce and declining tree in Britain. Almost all of Britain's surviving black poplars have been planted and derive from just a handful of individual trees which have been cloned. There is a fine mature black poplar in the churchyard at the south end of Foots Cray Meadows. Several more black poplars have been planted in the meadows, and some of these are now quite large. Two more mature black poplars, near the restaurant in Danson Park, were planted in the 1960s.

Bluebell

Bluebells are still common and widespread in suitable habitats, but there is some concern that climate change might cause them problems, especially in the south-east, where the climate is expected to become much drier. In urban areas, native bluebells are also threatened by hybridisation with the larger, paler garden bluebell, which sometimes escapes or is thrown out from gardens. An April visit to Lesnes Abbey Wood, Chalk Wood, Bexley Park Woods or North Cray Wood will reveal spectacular displays of blue flowers.

Common lizard

The common lizard can be found in a variety of habitats, including meadows, heathland, light scrub and wasteland. It needs sunny places to bask, some cover to hide from predators such as kestrels and cats, and a good supply of invertebrate food.

Kingfisher

The kingfisher can be seen along Bexley's rivers and streams. The usual encounter is a piercing whistle followed by a flash of vivid blue as the bird flies low over the water, but patience and luck can sometimes be rewarded with views of a kingfisher perched on a waterside branch or post. Kingfishers nest in holes in steep banks, usually well away from places that are busy with people, as they are very sensitive to disturbance when nesting.

Lesser calamint

Lesser calamint is member of the mint family and produces pale lavender flowers from August through to October. The stems and leaves are very strongly aromatic and it is attractive to insects. It is fairly tolerant of drought and poor stony soils. The only colony in London is at the top of a west-facing bank above Abbey Ponds at Lesnes Abbey. It has been known there for over a century. Nationally it is scarce and declining.

Newts

All three of Britain's native newt species occur in Bexley. The largest, the great crested newt, is declining throughout its range, and is fully protected under UK and European law. Great crested newts breed in a few ponds in the south of the borough, around Foots Cray Meadows and Bunkers Hill.

Skylark

The song of the skylark, delivered from high in the air, is a classic sound of the British countryside, and can be heard in several places in Bexley, including Erith and Crayford Marshes. Skylarks need a mix of long and short grass, with plenty of seeds and insects for food, and not too much disturbance from people and dogs.

Stag beetle

The stag beetle, Britain's largest beetle, is scarce and declining. South-east London, including Bexley, still supports strong populations of this spectacular insect, which is a common sight in the borough's parks and gardens in summer. Despite its fearsome appearance, the stag beetle is completely harmless to people. Its larvae feed on decaying wood, so it is important to leave dead tree stumps in the ground wherever possible.

Water vole

The water vole is one of Britain's best-loved mammals. It is rare and threatened with extinction, largely due to predation by introduced mink. Bexley still has strong populations of water voles in its marshes and rivers.

Wild daffodil

The wild ancestor of many cultivated daffodils provides a spectacular spring display in Lesnes Abbey Wood, its only natural site in London. This is probably the only natural population of wild daffodils in London.