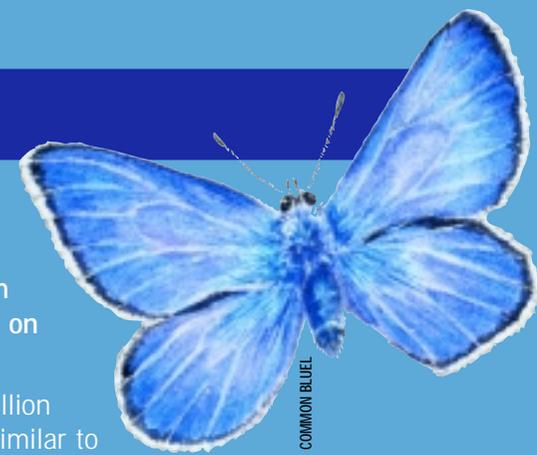


Sites of wildlife interest



12 The Coast: Trow Point to Lizard Point



COMMON BLUE

This is a spectacular landscape where thousands of nesting sea birds cling to the precipitous storm lashed cliffs and rare flowers thrive on the Magnesian limestone soils.

The rocks were laid down 250 million years ago when the climate was similar to that found today in the Arabian Gulf. Coral reefs grew in a shallow tropical sea and calcium-rich muds were laid down, which eventually became the Magnesian limestones that we see today.

The small hillock next to the coast road is Harton Downhill Local Nature Reserve, known locally as 'Blackberry Hills'. This is the most northerly site in Britain for perennial flax, a beautiful deep-blue flowered plant that is nationally rare. In spring there are hundreds of tiny cowslips, followed by greater knapweed and birds-foot trefoil, the food plant of the common blue butterfly.

Marsden Bay is a classic example of the effects of coastal erosion in an area with hard, resistant rocks. There are steep cliffs with a gently sloping 'wave-cut platform' at their base, and impressive stacks and arches which were left behind as the cliffs migrated inland. One such arch, Marsden Rock, was a famous landmark for generations until 1996 when the arch collapsed, showing just how destructive the sea can be.

The cliffs of Marsden Bay hold the largest sea bird colony in the north east, with thousands of pairs of nesting kittiwakes, hundreds of pairs of fulmars, cormorants and herring gulls and smaller numbers of shags, razorbills and lesser black-backed gulls.

The Leas is the biggest area of semi-natural grassland in the Borough, alive with butterflies and other insects in the summer and used by hunting short-eared owl during the winter. The grasslands opposite Marsden Limekilns, known as Rocket Green, are a good place to see beautiful and rare flowers such as bee orchid, yellow-wort and burnet-saxifrage.



PERENNIAL FLAX



BEE ORCHID



GREATER KNAPWEED, HARTON DOWNHILL

ACCESS
There is a good path all the way along the coast, but the cliffs can be dangerous so keep well away from the edge. Marsden Sands can be reached via a steep slope and/or flight of steps. If you venture onto the shore, make sure you are not endangered by rising tides.

TRANSPORT
There is a regular bus service along the Coast Road (no E1).