

RESOURCE GUIDE

Upland Commons

JOHN
MUIR
AWARD

wild places:
DISCOVER
EXPLORE
CONSERVE
SHARE

What are Upland Commons?

Common land is farmed land on which a number of 'Commoners' share rights to use the land or take resources from it, such as grazing for livestock, collecting bracken (for animal bedding), or wood and peat (for fuel or other uses). The grazing rights are usually linked to farms and often passed down through generations of the same family. More than 80% of common land is in the uplands, including 3000 km² in England mostly on the hills and moors of Devon, Yorkshire, the Lake District and Shropshire.



The common land is not owned by the Commoners but by someone else – an individual or organisation, and often more than one landowner for the same piece of Common. For example, the landowner may be a private individual, but they are still bound by the legal arrangements of Common Land.

What makes Upland Commons and commoning uniquely different from other upland farming is the shared use of the Common and the collaboration required between commoners and with the land owner and manager to ensure everyone benefits. There are currently 3900 active commoners farming England's common land. Many aspects of rural life people enjoy today such as the Lakeland Shows with their sheep and shepherds crook competitions, Cumberland wrestling and fell races have their origins in such collaborative working.

Upland Commons, Commoning and the John Muir Award

Where are they?

Check the Magic Map <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>. Select Access, then Registered Common Land, then zoom in to view them. Anybody can walk on Upland Commons, they are free and open for access on foot and many are areas well known as beautiful places to discover, explore and to have adventures. There are many bridleways on commons for access on bikes and horses. You can enjoy upland commons to wildlife watch and for other recreation. But to really understand Upland Commons you should visit them and find out about what they provide both for society and for those who work on them – livestock grazing, biodiversity, carbon storage and water quality as well as for recreation. With the challenges of adaptation to climate change and loss of biodiversity it is more important than ever that we care for Upland Commons so that they provide improved habitat for plant and wildlife, water management, healthy trees and peat bog as well as livestock grazing. For local communities they also provide a sense of place which underpins rural life and traditional skills.

Although Commons now only cover 3% of England they have a high level of designation. In England 21% of all England's Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are commons and 12% of all Scheduled Ancient Monuments are found on common land. Some upland Commons are National Nature Reserves (NNR) including Moorhouse NNR (Cumbria) and Stiperstones NNR (Shropshire).

Visiting Commons.

We all need to behave responsibly when using Common Land so please follow the [Countryside Code](#) when visiting.

Countryside Code film on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMLHrBtLMTI>

If you take part in John Muir Award activity on Upland Commons and share your activity on social media please use **#JohnMuirAward** and **#CommonsAreForAll**.

John Muir Award examples

Read how schools in Shropshire Hills and the Lake District have completed their John Muir Award activity with a focus on Upland Commons and Commoning.

Shropshire Hills Federation of Schools - <https://tinyurl.com/yy9q7l4v>

Ennerdale and Patterdale Schools - <https://tinyurl.com/y5jfhpnh>

Useful Websites

This is by no means an exhaustive list - just a starting point. Many classroom-based resources can be adapted for use in the outdoors.

Foundation for Common Land www.foundationforcommonland.org.uk – established to protect the public benefits of pastoral commoning. They publish a series of [Fact Sheets](#) which cover wildlife, archaeology, tourism, rare breeds, carbon storage, water supply, uplands, agriculture and water and flood management. Also see a description of the [Our Common Cause: Our Upland Commons](#) project about valuing Upland Commons.

Open Spaces Society www.oss.org.uk/commons - they aim to be the guardian of all commons in England and Wales, and are notified of all applications for works on, and exchanges of, common land.

Local information and regional contacts for Upland Commons can be found on:

If you are visiting a common for your John Muir Award you can contact the Foundation for Common Land who can help you contact one of the Commoners (see link above).

Dartmoor National Park – [The Commons](#)

Dartmoor Commoners Council - www.dartmoorcommonerscouncil.org.uk

Federation of Cumbria Commoners - www.cumbriacommoners.org.uk

Shropshire Hills AONB – [local aspects of the Our Common Cause: Our Upland Commons](#) project about valuing upland commons.

Whilst not focused on *Upland* Commons the **#RealNewForest** has an Educational Toolkit with many activities which could be adapted to the uplands www.realnewforest.org/education-toolkit

Magic Map Application <https://magic.defra.gov.uk> As well as finding out where Commons are (see p.1) this map allows you to see many other aspects of commons using the various layers selected using the side menu. For example, look for: Historic Environment (under Countryside Stewardship layers), Designations (for example Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Nature Reserves), Habitats and Species.

Surveys are a great way for you to both find out a bit more about an Upland Common and can highlight how different commons produce different public benefits. Here are some which you may be able to complete on Upland Commons (many other Surveys including of birds, bugs and bees can be found in the [Surveys Resource Guide](#)).

MICCI – [Moorland Indicators of Climate Change Initiative](#) A survey on peat bogs recording peat depth, vegetation coverage and biodiversity, water table depth and coloration, along with location and weather data.

[Dark Sky Inspiration's Light Pollution Survey](#) – discover how dark your night sky is.

[Big Butterfly Count](#) – help take nature's pulse with accessible resources from Butterfly Conservation.

Biodiversity is the variety of life on Earth. It is all around us. Not just on Upland Commons, in wild places and nature reserves but also in our cities, the places we live and work, our farmland and our countryside. It is the life support system of our planet and serves us in many ways, providing food, medicines and other materials, a clean and healthy environment, and colour and beauty in our surroundings. See the [Biodiversity Resource Guide](#) for further links.

National Biodiversity Network www.nbn.org.uk - Submit a sighting through [irecord](#) to your local Record Centre.

Field Studies Council ID charts www.field-studies-council.org/publications.aspx - Videos, images and facts on the world's species, as well as great educational resources.

