

# Les Landes de L'Est

## Site of Special (Ecological) Interest



### Introduction

Les Landes de L'Est, otherwise known as Les Landes, is one of the Island's largest Sites of Special Interest (SSI), covering 102 hectares and forming the north-west corner of the Jersey National Park. It is the largest single block of maritime heathland anywhere in the Channel Islands and offers visitors a feeling of wildness and remoteness.

The site's location provides an important ecological link between St Ouen's Bay and the north coast, supporting a range of habitats and species, some of which are unique to the area. Large parts of the site are in public ownership, but the SSI incorporates other areas of private and common land.



*Spotted Cat's-ear*

The site is an open plateau lying 80m above mean sea level and the underlying rock is primarily granite, resulting in thin and acidic soils, which in turn heavily influences the vegetation which favours these conditions. The hardness of the bedrock has led to the creation of the dramatic, steep cliffs which we see today. The openness and feeling of wildness on offer are fantastic with wonderful views across the mauves and yellows of the gorse and heather towards the other Channel Islands to the north.

Jersey's climate is oceanic, and the north-west coast of Jersey is wide-open to the full force of Atlantic gales making Les Landes one of the most exposed areas of the Island. The wind is usually wet and salty, which has an effect particularly on the vegetation in the area. Much of the bracken and heather on these north-western slopes is burnt and browned by this salt-laden wind. Unlike the warmth-loving wildlife found on the Island's south west coast, at Les Landes the plants are dwarfed and stunted which are adaptations to help cope with the high exposure and harsh conditions.

### History

Archaeological studies of the site have revealed human settlement across multiple time lines with many remains and influences still evident today. The awe-inspiring rock of Le Pinnacle has seen settlements created at its base dating from the Neolithic, through the Chalcolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age and the Post Classical Period, with the remains of a Gallo Roman temple being discovered.



*Green Hairstreak*

Another well renowned archaeological site is La Cotte à la Chèvre, a small cave where a number of Lower Palaeolithic flints and a hand axe have been found. 200,000 years ago sea levels were much lower than they are today and the cave would have overlooked grassy plains, ideal for hunting. Recently Les Landes has also been designated as a Prehistoric Landscape to reflect the area's important contribution of evidence supporting European prehistory.

Today, one of the largest impacts on the visual landscape are the fortifications built by the Germans. These form part of an integrated network of defensive structures built in Jersey during the Second World War which also range beyond our shores as

part of the Atlantic Wall. The tallest structure is the coastal artillery direction and range finding tower MP3 - one of three such towers in Jersey which are of unique design to the Channel Islands.

Another well-known and much loved landscape feature is Grosnez Castle, a fortified stronghold thought to have been built around 1330 to serve as a refuge from French attack. The 14th century was the period of the Hundred Years' War, when the French were making constant hit-and-run raids on the Island. The castle was twice captured by the French, in 1373 and 1381.

## Management

Les Landes is managed as a heathland site with gorse and heathers dominating the vegetation. Heathland is a semi-natural habitat meaning that it has been entirely created by human activities. In this case, the heather and gorse cover across the site is a direct result of livestock being grazed here since medieval times. The following projects help maintain the heathland in its current condition:

1) It's important to maintain a varied heathland age and height structure in order to attract a wide variety of wildlife. This involves cutting the heather and gorse stands to create patches of open ground to provide multiple ecological conditions for the wide variety of plants, insects and other animals which inhabit Les Landes.

2) Without the grazing of livestock, **Bracken** tends to become dominant on heathlands. The spread of bracken, a fern, is controlled so that it doesn't negatively impact on more important habitats.

3) The wetland area known as Le Canne de Squez which is spanned by a footbridge provides an important wetland refuge within the wide expanse of otherwise dry heathland. This habitat is dominated by **Purple Moor-Grass** which grows in large dense tussocks which used to be cut at the base and used as stools. Although they are no longer used as stools, some tussocks are still removed to create and maintain open pools.



*Heather mining bee*

## Wildlife

The wildlife at Les Landes differs subtly from that found on the warmer south-west coast heathlands. Plants such as **Cowslip** and **Spotted-Cat's Ear** occur here, both of which have a very restricted distribution elsewhere.

Les Landes is a very good place to spot the **Green Hairstreak** butterfly flitting between thrift and gorse flowers in the summer months and another butterfly, the **Grayling**, can be seen here in good numbers, although it is of conservation concern across its European range.



*Dartford Warbler*

The wetlands and open water at Le Canne de Squez provide welcome conditions for a number of rare and unusual species including **Cotton Grass** which does not occur elsewhere in Jersey and the **Western Common Toad**, which breeds amongst the seasonal ponds.

In recent years the **Chough** has been seen circling above the coastal slopes and its charismatic call heard. The reintroduction of the chough as a breeding species to our Island is one of the objectives of the Birds on the Edge project; a conservation partnership programme between the Department of the Environment, Jersey Zoo and the National Trust for Jersey. The



fastest animal in the world, the **Peregrine Falcon** is at home here and can be seen hunting for rock doves and the **Short-Eared Owl** can also be seen hunting for small mammals over the heathland.

The secretive **Dartford Warbler** nests amongst the dense gorse which offers protection from predators and the **Wheatear**, with its prominent eye stripe and white rump, is one of the many birds which call by for periods on their passage of migration.

## Visiting

Les Landes incorporates the western end of the iconic north coast walking route and it is also a short, but fairly steep walk from L'Etacq in St Ouen's Bay. There are four car parks across the site from which a selection of circular walks can be enjoyed.

Bus route 8 provides a frequent service to Les Landes. From here you have the options of starting the north coast walk heading east towards *Plemont* and Grève de Lecq or exploring the plentiful ecological and historical features that the north-west corner of Jersey has to offer.

A couple of Les Landes car parks have bicycle racks available and the nearest public toilets are at Goldsmiths slip in St Ouen's bay to the west, and Plemont to the east.



*Wheatear*

## Photo credits

Anne Haden: Spotted Cat's-ear  
Tim Ransom: Heather mining bee  
Adrian Ellis: Green Hairstreak  
Romano da Costa: Dartford Warbler, Wheatear  
Author: Tim Liddiard



**Biodiversity**



**Government of Jersey**