

Eycott Hill's natural history

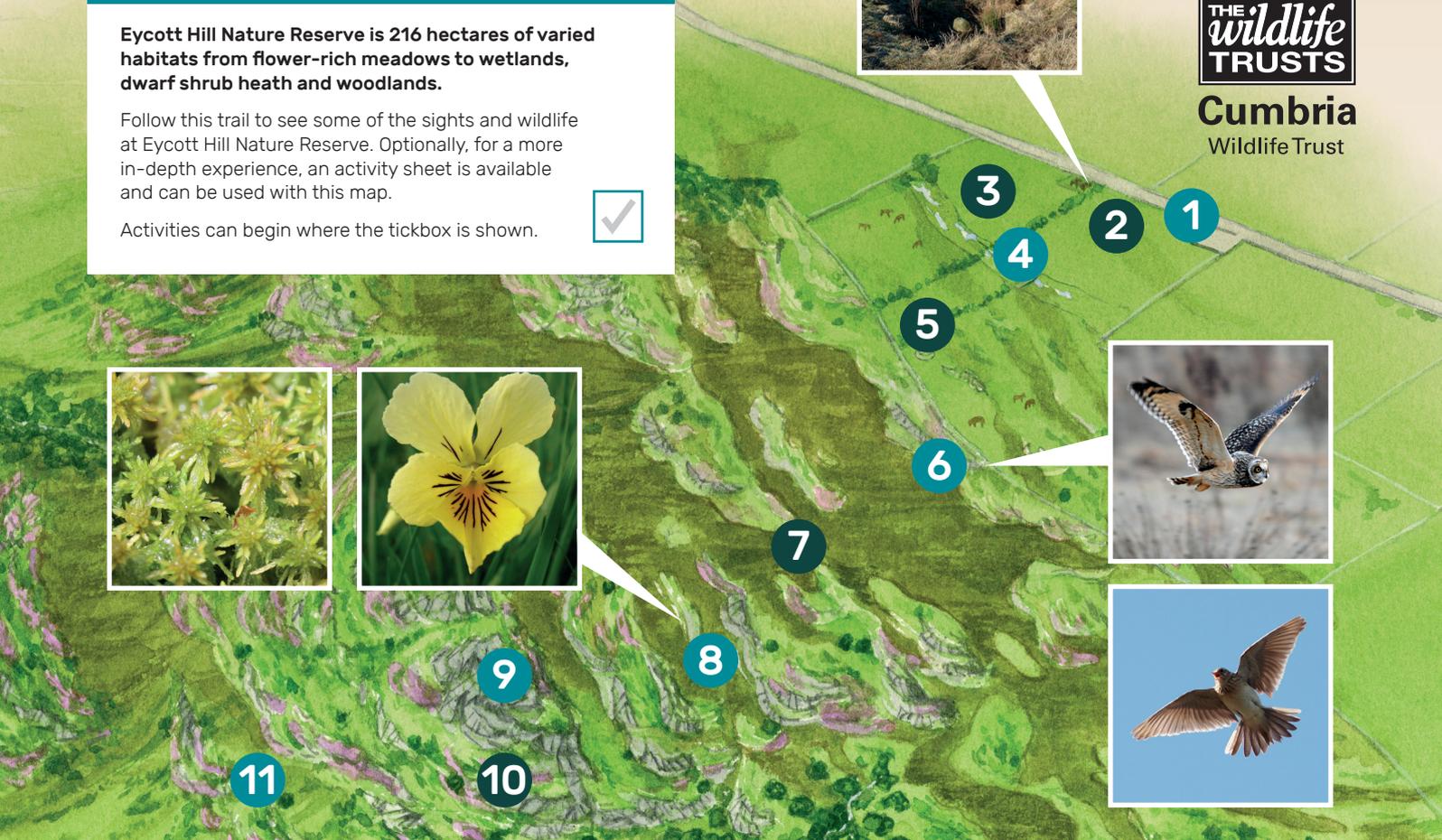
Eycott Hill Nature Reserve is 216 hectares of varied habitats from flower-rich meadows to wetlands, dwarf shrub heath and woodlands.

Follow this trail to see some of the sights and wildlife at Eycott Hill Nature Reserve. Optionally, for a more in-depth experience, an activity sheet is available and can be used with this map.

Activities can begin where the tickbox is shown.



Cumbria
Wildlife Trust



1. Droppings and pellets

Poo and bird of prey pellets are great evidence of wildlife; keep an eye out and see if you can identify whose poo you have found along the way.

2. Limestone sinkholes

As limestone reacts with rainwater, which is very weakly acidic, it dissolves to form hollows in the ground known as sinkholes.

3. Hay meadows

Walking through hay meadows is very destructive, for a closer look, please keep to edges of the fields.

96% of hay meadows have vanished from the UK's landscape. One of the reasons for this is that hardly any farmers manage their fields for growing hay (a collection of wildflower and grasses which, when dried, can be fed to animals). Using fields in this way provides an ideal habitat for many wonderful invertebrates who also provide birds with food. At Eycott Hill we have restored six hectares into idyllic hay meadows by seeding and plug planting.

4. Invertebrates

As you cross the bridge, keep an eye out for large red damselflies and four-spotted chaser dragonflies.

You may see many other flying insects across the nature reserve.

5. Viewpoint

From here there is a great view of the nature reserve and surrounding fells. Notice the wall and the floor of the viewpoint is made of various different rocks? Pale grey limestone, dark grey Skiddaw slate, and dark green, almost black volcanic rock; these all represent the geology that makes up Eycott Hill.

6. Birds

The nature reserve is home to many wonderful birds, such as curlew, meadow pipit and short-eared owl. Listen for the inexhaustible call of the skylark.

7. Lava flows

The path meanders around rock formations that were formed by lava flows around 450 million years ago!

8. Vegetation

There is a lot of interesting vegetation at Eycott from wetland species, such as sedges and sphagnum moss, to many seasonal plants, such as:
March: wood anemone
May: mountain pansy, common butterwort

June: mountain everlasting
July – October: grass-of-Parnassus, devil's-bit scabious

Near the summit of Eycott Hill juniper has been planted and is slowly expanding - this native conifer is becoming a rare sight in the UK, so reintroductions are very important.

9. Cooling columns

Have a look at the crags around the summit. Here, small crystals show that the lavas here cooled very quickly from about 1,000°C forming rough, nearly hexagonal cooling columns.

10. Summit

What a lovely view! How many fells can you count? Can you spot Blencathra and Great Mell Fell. Looking back to the car park, notice the lava ridges.

11. Feldspar crystals

Please note: there is no way-marked route to this area so extra care is needed.

Downhill from the summit are some of Eycott's oldest lava flows, here you can see large and shiny feldspar crystals.

Photo credits: Limestone sinkholes, Oscar Adams; Buzzard, Short eared owl, Amy Lewis; Skylark, Stefan Johansson; Mountain pansy, Philip Precey; Sphagnum moss, Vicky Nall.