

An Introduction to Blackheath's Clovers and Allies

A project by Joe Beale, created in association with The Natural History Museum's Identification Trainers for the Future programme, June 2017



About Blackheath's Clovers

Blackheath is home to a wide range of interesting and beautiful flowering plants. While the flowers seeded in the bunds at the Heath's perimeter may first catch the eye, it is the wild flowers that still survive across the open Heath, with their subtle beauty, that are the real stars! Many of Blackheath's interesting flowers belong to the Clover family: the Fabaceae. Here is a selection of some of the key species you may see flowering in spring-summer.

The rarer species were rediscovered by Juliet Cairns a few years ago, having previously been thought lost after Blackheath's grasslands were levelled and "improved". Further studies found more patches of these apparently lost clovers that botanists used to visit from far and wide to see. Parts of the Heath are currently being managed for biodiversity by the two councils, with input from local conservationists.



The management is still somewhat trial and error, however, and the increasing pressures on the Heath from entertainment events or amenity use mean we must be very careful to make sure we maintain our unusual flora and the acid grassland habitat that supports it.

Some species are easier to find than others and it may take a little practise to "get your eye in". The best way, perhaps, is to bring a picnic and a camera and take your time exploring Blackheath! Once you find some, take a close look at the beauty and gentle colours and shapes of the flowers or seedpods. A hand lens or magnifying glass will bring you closer to a marvellous miniature world.



1

Clustered Clover

Trifolium glomeratum

Flowers May-June. Distinctively globular flowerheads, unstalked, appearing at intervals along a creeping stem with attractive pale pinkish flowers. Its leaves are slightly toothed at the edges. Rare nationally, often coastal, but on Blackheath it is common in places.



Knotted Clover

Trifolium striatum

2

Flowers May-June. Low spreading or upright, leaves with soft down and smooth edges (not toothed). Small pink flowers in clusters, not stalked, and very delicately pretty when seen under a hand lens. Flowerheads are oval. Local in sandy/acid soils.

White Clover

Trifolium repens

3

Flowers May-Sept. Leaflets have a whitish v-shaped band. Large rounded flowerheads on long stalks have white or white-pink flowers, the lowest flowers drooping and becoming brownish later. One appropriate folk name is "Milky Blobs". Very common. Red Clover *T. pratense* also has white inverted v on leaflets and has often large, reddish-pink flowerheads.



4

Hop Trefoil

Trifolium campestre

Flowers May-Sept. Leaflets are minutely toothed and each central leaflet has a longer stalk. The 20 to 30 yellow flowers are vaguely reminiscent of scooped butter and packed into round flowerheads. These mature to brownish heads, resembling hop fruits. Common.



Common Bird's-foot-trefoil

Lotus corniculatus

Flowers May-Sept. Low-growing, leaves with 5 leaflets, lowest pair bent back and less obvious. 2-7 cheerfully bright yellow flowers in fan-shaped clusters, often with red elements (folk name "Bacon-and-Eggs"). Seed pods resemble a bird's foot. Larval food-plant of the Common Blue butterfly (pictured). Common.

Bird's-foot

Ornithopus perpusillus

6

Flowers May-July. Low-growing. 3-8 exquisite tiny white flowers with pink-red veins in a flowerhead. Leaves with 4-10 pairs of small, opposite (pinnate) leaflets plus a terminal leaflet. Seedpods 10-15mm, grouped in threes like a bird's claw. Very small but can form extensive patches. Local on dry/sandy soils.



7 Hare's-foot Clover

Trifolium arvense

Flowers May-Aug. In upright or creeping clusters. Narrow, longer leaves with attractive oval, fluffy-looking flowerheads, resembling a fluffy hare's foot, each with many small whitish or pink flowers. Locally frequent in dry, sandy places.



8 Black Medick

Medicago lupulina

Flowers Apr-Sept. Its downy, oval leaflets each have a tiny terminal "tooth" (Trefoils don't have this). 20-50 tightly packed small yellow flowers crowd onto each long-stalked and rounded flowerhead. Seed pods in small black clusters, not spiny. Common.

9 Lesser Trefoil

Trifolium dubium

Flowers May-Sept. Not hairy, the leaflets lack a point and it has 10-26 pale yellow flowers on each flowerhead. Its seed pods are small and straight and dead brown flowers cover them. This is thought to be the real Irish Shamrock. Common.



10 Slender Trefoil

Trifolium micranthum

Flowers May-July. Resembles a slenderer Lesser Trefoil but only has 2-6 darker yellow flowers in each flowerhead, with long thin stalks and unstalked terminal leaflets. Local.



11 Spotted Medick

Medicago arabica

Flowers Apr-Sept. Has only 1-4 yellow flowers on each flowerhead. Leaflets usually each have an obvious dark spot and the seed pods are spiral, coiled and spiny. Common.

12 Grass Vetchling

Lathyrus nissolia

Flowers May-July. Can grow to c90cm. Long thin grasslike leaves (modified stems) have no tendrils. Flowers are reddish-pink, with long, elegant stalks, one or two flowers per flowerhead. Often in long grass. Local.



13

Common Vetch

Vicia sativa

Flowers April-Sept. Clambering, with ladder-like leaves. It has tendrils that have a dark spot at the base of toothed stipules. Flowers are pink-purple and noticeable. Common in longer grass.



Gorse
Ulex europaeus

14

Flowers all year. An evergreen spiky shrub, characteristic of the wilder edges of Blackheath. Golden-yellow flowers have a pleasant coconut scent. Common.

Woolly Clover
Trifolium tomentosum

15

Flowers pink. Rare, found in very few UK locations. Woolly, bulbous seed pods.



Useful links

Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland (BSBI) <http://bsbi.org/>
 Natural History Museum <http://www.nhm.ac.uk/>
 London Natural History Society <http://lnhs.org.uk/>
 The Blackheath Society <http://www.blackheath.org/>
 The Westcombe Society <http://www.westcombesociety.org/>



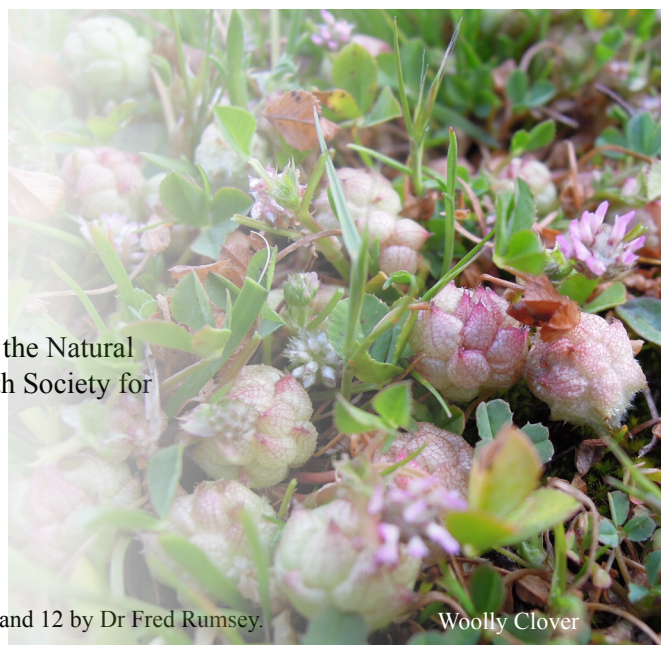
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Images

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Woolly Clover

