

Twyford Waterworks is surrounded by three acres of chalk grassland that has not been ploughed, sprayed or fertilised since it was downland grazing fenced in by the waterworks in 1898. Everything here is native, and nothing has been introduced or planted.

It is home to over 200 different types of flowering plants, many different birds, bats, butterflies and other insects, small mammals, amphibians, slow-worms and lizards, as well as larger mammals such as foxes, badgers, moles and rabbits. Many of these creatures are shy so you will be lucky if you see them today.

Please keep to the mown paths at all times

There are name boards to tell you where you are

Please take care. In places the path is uneven, has tree roots, and is steep, and there are also nettles.

Please do not touch any animals or insects, or pick any flowers or berries.

THE WILDLIFE TRAIL starts here at the **OVERLOOK**, where our friendly wildlife team are here to help you spot and identify any items of interest!

Summer is all too quickly passing, but there is still much to see on the Trail. Listen too for the crickets and grasshoppers that are very active on warmer days. We've put labels on some of the wild plants – see how many you can spot as you follow the trail.

Walk along the path and climb the steps up to **LIME KILNS CORNER**. Go left around the end of the lime kilns and follow the path round the railway wagons to the kilns. Sometimes you may spot a Lizard sunbathing on the railway sleepers here!

Follow the sign to take you round the back of the kilns and then cross over the industrial railway by the level crossing, taking care to look both ways.

THE LOWER MEADOW is strimmed and raked each Spring to clear away old vegetation so that the grass and Marjoram, Thyme, Rockrose, Agrimony and Devil's-bit Scabious can flourish. Pick a Marjoram leaf to enjoy its herby smell!

There are impressive anthills hidden in the grass – these can be up to 150 years old and their size can be used to estimate when a field was last cultivated. The Lower Meadow is a favourite place for many other creatures too: slow worms, lizards, bumblebees, and green woodpeckers that come to hunt for ants, as well as the kestrels, sparrowhawks and buzzards - and owls at night - that patrol the whole site.

Follow the path around the lower part of the meadow and under the oak tree. In this section you can see typical chalkland shrubs such as yew, spindle, elder and buckthorn, the foodplant of the yellow Brimstone butterfly caterpillar.

The scene is now dominated by our magnificent **WALNUT TREE** which is thought to be well over 200 years old, so was here long before the Waterworks!

The path now passes the **UPPER MEADOW**. Formerly overgrown, this is cut and raked every autumn, which is slowly improving it. Note all the Wild Parsnip in flower and seeding, which is enjoying the more open conditions and has grown from the soil seed bank. This area has become a favourite place for butterflies. Some of the trees on the boundary have thick ivy growing up them, which provides shelter and food for many insects and small birds.

The corrugated panels on the ground are there to encourage our reptile and small mammal population. Sometimes we find slow-worms and field voles under them but ants and snails are more common!

Enjoy a stop at the **HIDE**, where you can look out over the pond and join in with other activities. Follow the path round to **THE POND**, which has an abundance of wildlife. It has all sorts of different plants too, and an island complete with a duck house! The pond is also home to many damselflies and dragonflies, which may be seen skimming around, mating and laying eggs. The pond is carefully managed as a natural pond so can look neglected, but that's how nature prefers it.

To continue the Trail, walk down the short wooded section, perhaps turning left along the new path. Both paths bring you out at the **PICNIC MEADOW**, another of the grassland areas that is cut each year in the autumn. The picnic benches are a very pleasant place for a picnic - or just to stop and enjoy the view.

To continue, follow the path past the end of the railway, stop to wave to the train driver and then turn left along **RAILWAY VIEW**. On your right the hedge was traditionally laid in 2022, and is thickening up well to provide another good habitat in years to come.

At this point you can walk straight ahead back to the Lime Kilns, or you can continue the trail by turning right down the slope called **BUCKTHORN HILL**. The buckthorn bush is on your right in a grass and flower meadow that has yet to be better managed for wildlife, and we have an exciting plan for this winter! Head on down the slope carefully until you reach **THE STEPS**. At the bottom of the steps turn right, then left down onto the mowed lawn, and make your way back towards the main buildings.

Please pop up the steps again opposite the Tea Room to let our wildlife team know of any interesting wildlife that you have seen and write these on the board so that others can look out for them.

We hope that you have enjoyed following the Trail!

TWT

September 2024