

The Marsh Harrier Trail takes you to the northern part of the Woodwalton Fen reserve, past the Rothschild bungalow and to a bird hide overlooking a vast reedbed.

1 As you set off on the main ride keep your eyes peeled for a special plant that was introduced here.

The Fen Ragwort was introduced to the reserve in the 1990s as part of a Species Recovery Programme to protect this very rare plant. It is still thriving today.

Have a look for it as you walk along the main drove. There are other plants on the reserve, such as Fen Violet and Fen Woodrush which are very scarce in the UK, making Woodwalton Fen a nationally important site for these species.



Fen Ragwort Photo by Peter Wakely/Natural England

2 The bungalow was built by Charles Rothschild in 1911.

It has remained largely unchanged, although the roof was re-thatched for the first time in 2011. On the right-hand stilts you can see marks indicating the level of the peat at various points in time. On a second stilt, water levels have been marked showing the years when the reserve has had severe flooding. The bungalow is occasionally open during events, and on some weekends during the summer—please see the Great Fen website for opening dates.

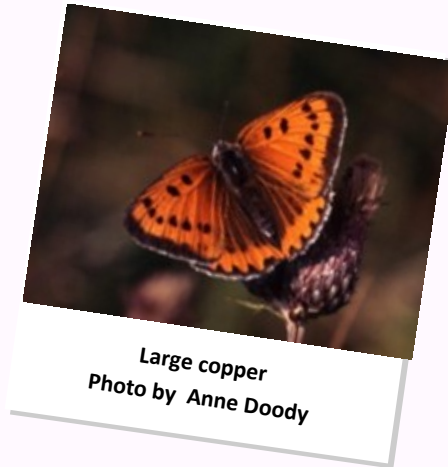


3 You are now passing the 'copper fields' to your right as you head north. This is the site of the attempted re-introduction of the Large Copper butterfly.

The Large Copper became extinct in the UK in the 19th century but in 1927 a re-introduction programme began with specimens from the Dutch race of the butterfly being reared in captivity and released onto the fen.

The caterpillar's food plant, the Greater Water Dock, was also planted in these fields so the insects could be released to

try to build a sustainable population. However, the butterflies could not survive unaided and so the experiment finally ceased in the 1990's.



Large copper Photo by Anne Doody

4 Take the boardwalk up to the North Hide where there are great views over the reedbed and, sometimes, great aerial displays can be seen.

The extensive reedbed you see from the hide was created by clearing dense areas of scrub and re-establishing ditches. It is kept wet all year round using the wind pump to abstract and store water. In addition the reedbed is managed to maintain an open structure and diversity with some of the reed being used for thatching.

The north hide is the best view point on the reserve to see the Marsh Harrier. They nest here in summer and use the reedbed to roost in winter. In the spring the pairs show off with amazing aerial acrobatics and you may also see food prey being passed from the male to female when they are rearing young. In the winter time you may also be lucky enough to see Bearded Tits or a Bittern flying into the reedbed.



Pair of Marsh Harriers
Photo by Guy Pilkington

5 The last section of the trail leads to the eastern boundary and the large sluice gate on the Great Raveley drain.

The Middle Level Commissioners designated the reserve as a flood storage area in 1980 and the sluice gate can be closed to divert water onto the reserve when there is a high flood risk to neighbouring farmland. It is hoped in time that the wider Great Fen area will provide additional flood storage to alleviate the pressure on Woodwalton Fen from the flood events which can be detrimental to both water quality and wildlife.

As you stroll back along this path you may notice the 2m high Marsh Sow Thistle towering over you. This was introduced to the reserve as a declining wetland species found in the south east of England, particularly East Anglia. It has flourished here at Woodwalton Fen. The Great Fen will connect Woodwalton Fen to Holme Fen to create a stunning area for wildlife and people. Across this area there will be new walking and cycling routes, and flood protection for surrounding farms and communities.

Woodwalton Fen is a National Nature Reserve and an International Wetland and is managed by Natural England.

Discover trails, local stories, photos and film on the Great Fen website, www.greatfen.org.uk

Great Fen team

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The Wildlife Trust Countryside Centre, Chapel Road, Ramsey Heights, PE26 2RS. (usually staffed 9am-4pm Mon-Fri).

For any enquiries directly relating to the National Nature Reserve, please contact Natural England: 01487 812363

This trail guide is also available in large print from the Great Fen team.

Large Print



**Explore Wildlife:
the Marsh Harrier Trail
Woodwalton Fen
National Nature
Reserve**



Marsh Harrier Trail

1 mile (1.6 km)
about 50 mins



This trail is Heritage Lottery Funded

The Great Fen is delivered by:



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