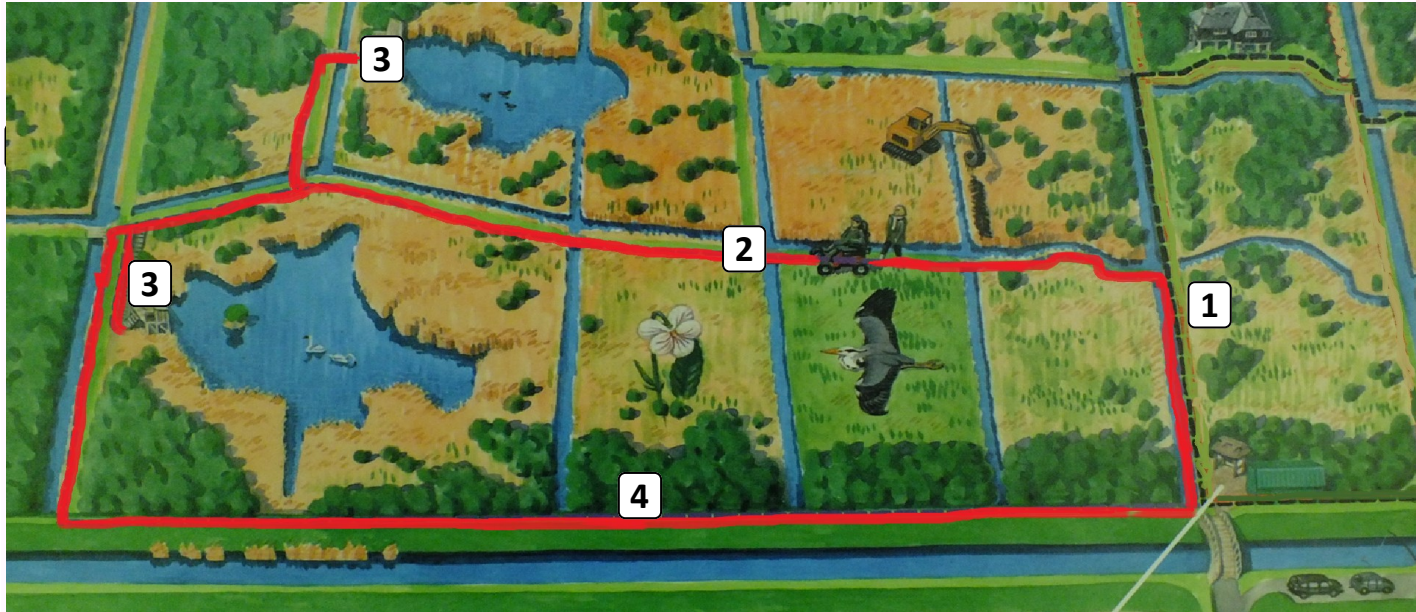


The Water Birds Trail takes you into the heart of the Woodwalton Fen National Nature Reserve, visiting two bird hides and the bank of Great Raveley Drain.

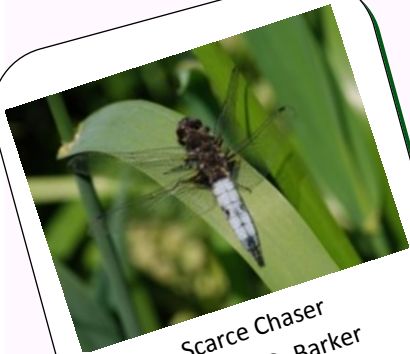


1 As you stroll along the grassy rides on the Water Bird trail you will be surrounded by the sounds of the fens: the rustling of the reeds, the song of a Reed Warbler in summer, or just the peace and tranquillity of a place lost in time.

In spring and summer the reeds surrounding the rides are alive with the songs and call of small birds such as Reed Buntings, Reed and Sedge Warblers. They nest among the reed stems and busily forage for small insects to feed to their young.

On a warm sunny day the rides will also be alive with dragonflies and damselflies, their larvae emerging from the ditches in the warmer weather and changing into their adult form.

The dragonflies also attract a larger aerial predator—the Hobby, a bird of prey which visits the UK in the summer from Africa. They are amazing aerial acrobats and can be seen eating their prey on the wing. They have bred in Woodwalton Fen in recent years.



Scarce Chaser
Photo by D. Barker

2 The ditches on the reserve provide vital habitat for many aquatic invertebrates, plants and other wildlife.

The diversity of plants in the ditch systems is important for the abundance of invertebrate life lurking beneath. Many invertebrates such as the mosquito have an aquatic life stage, while others like pond snails and water beetles spend their entire lives within the water system.

Keep a look out on the banks for Grass Snakes, and listen for the plop of a Water Vole as it disappears under the water. You may also encounter a family of Mute Swans making use of the network of ditches that provide their favourite food, duckweed.

3 Rothschild's and Gordon's hides are raised on stilts and overlook two meres of the same name.

The meres were formed in the 1960s and 1970s, when clay was excavated from here to build the boundary banks of the reserve. The meres now provide valuable habitat and many species of waterfowl can be seen here. Some, like the Mallard and Tufted Duck, can be seen all year while others, such as Wigeon and Pochard, are winter visitors.

In Rothschild's mere there is a nesting platform where Common Terns breed. Cormorants are often seen here too, drying their wings after fishing.

A patient and lucky visitor may glimpse an elusive Bearded Tit in the reed stems or even spot a stalking Bittern at the edge of the reeds.

4

The last section of the trail leads to the eastern boundary of the reserve and returns along the side the Great Raveley drain.

(Please note that the eastern boundary track is closed at times due to waterlogging so, if necessary, please retrace your steps to avoid this section.)

As you walk out to the eastern bank watch for winter flocks of Siskins and Redpolls as they feed on the cones of the mature alder trees. Noisy flocks of Long-tailed Tits also form in the winter: they look like flying balls of fluff with tails, as they pass by all too quickly.

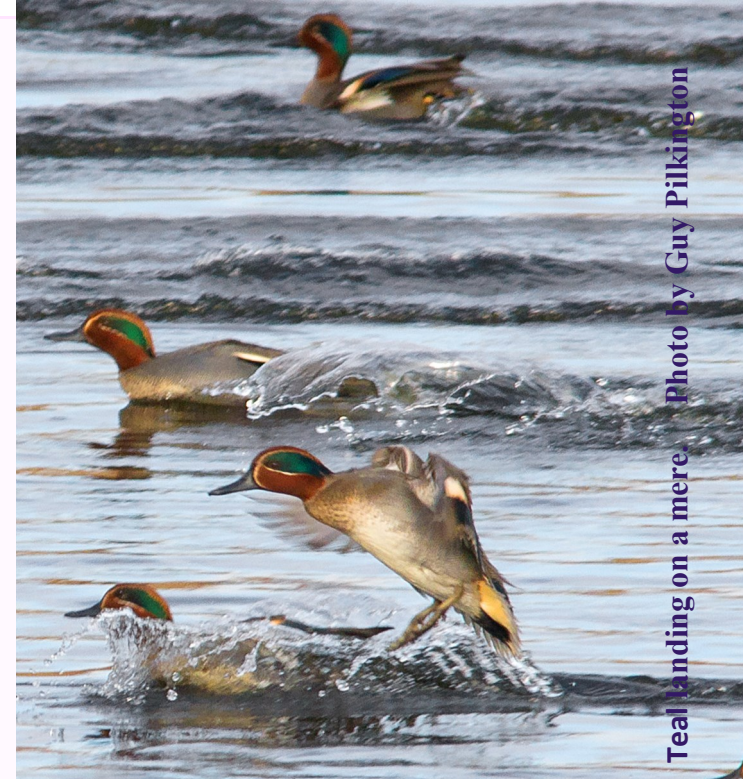
As you emerge alongside the Great Raveley Drain and head north, watch for Common Terns and Kingfishers as they speed along close to the surface looking for small fish. There is also an increasing chance of encountering an Otter. They now breed on the Great Fen and their droppings (spraint) and the remains of fish and are sometimes found on this bank.

This eastern track forms part of the route for butterfly monitoring on the reserve and is a good sunny and sheltered spot to see many species including the Comma, Orange Tip and Common Blue.

The Great Fen is a 50-year project that will connect Woodwalton Fen to Holme Fen, creating a huge area for wildlife and for people. There will be new walking and cycling routes, improved flood protection for surrounding farms and communities and a landscape-scale reserve for wildlife.

Woodwalton Fen is a National Nature Reserve, a Special Protection Area and a wetland of international importance listed by the Ramsar Convention. It is managed by Natural England.

Discover more trails, news, photos and film on the Great Fen website, www.greatfen.org.uk or please get in touch with the team.



Teal landing on a mere. Photo by Guy Pilkington

Great Fen team

Tel: 01487 710420

Email: info@greatfen.org.uk

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 Waterbirds Trail WOODWALTON FEN NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE



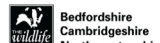
Water Birds Trail

1.5 miles (2.4 km)
about 1 hr 20 mins



This trail is Heritage Lottery Funded

The Great Fen is delivered by:



www.greatfen.org.uk