

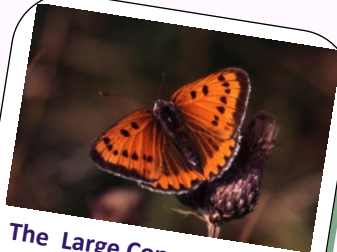
The Bungalow trail tells the story of the Rothschilds, and how Woodwalton Fen has survived as one of the last remaining fragments of wild fen.

1 A lost world

If you had visited Woodwalton Fen a few hundred years ago, the wild fens around you would have stretched for over 850,000 acres (1,350 square miles).

The mixture of reedbeds, fen meadows and water provided one of the richest areas for wildlife in the country.

When the fens were drained to create farmland, more than 99% of these wild areas disappeared. Most fen species could not survive on the new farmland and many, such as the Large Copper butterfly, disappeared.



The Large Copper became extinct in Britain when nearby Whittlesea Mere was drained.
Photo by Anne Doody

Woodwalton Fen is one of the last fragments of wild fen to survive. Although it is relatively small, at 514 acres, this reserve is home to over 5,000 species. Many are rare or endangered, and some are found almost nowhere else in the country.

Recognised nationally and internationally, this is a unique and beautiful place to explore.



2 The Rothschild effect

As you walk along the paths, you might hear the calls of birds or catch a glimpse of colourful insects. Almost 1,000 species of butterflies and moths have made a home here, alongside over half of all the UK's dragonfly species.



Charles Rothschild

If it wasn't for one man, none of this would exist. The Hon. Nathaniel Charles Rothschild, was a successful city banker with a passion for entomology (the study of insects). He saw that at the end of the 19th century, Britain's wild areas were disappearing at an alarming rate.

He recognised that if nothing were done, these wild places and the wildlife that relied on them would be lost forever.

Charles had both the vision and the financial resources to make a difference. He bought up land to create the first nature reserves in Britain: Wicken Fen in 1899 and the second, here in Woodwalton Fen, in 1910. He also set up the Society for the Protection of

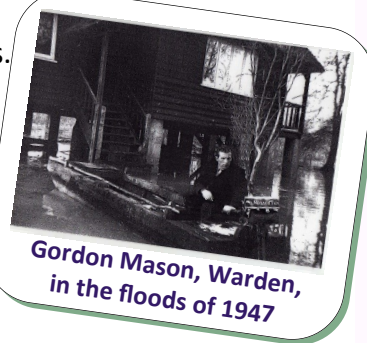


The rare scarce chaser dragonfly

3 The bungalow on stilts

In front of you is the Rothschild Bungalow, which is over 100 years old, built in 1911. Charles used this building as a base for his field trips, including the study of moths and other insects.

On the far right, the original concrete stilts show the marks of fen floods. In the 1960's, Woodwalton Fen was made into a floodwater storage area to protect surrounding land in times of heavy rain.



It was hoped that this would help solve the problem of Woodwalton Fen drying out as the surrounding farmland continued to be drained.

4 The future: a view over the Great Fen

Woodwalton Fen is currently too small and isolated: species with small populations have reduced genetic diversity and risk being wiped out by extreme weather or disease. When floodwater is stored here it often comes at the wrong time of year for wildlife and it contains nitrates from farms, which interfere with the fragile ecosystem.

The floodbank gives an excellent view of the future. Look for Holme Fen's treeline in the far distance to your right (north-west).

The Great Fen will connect Woodwalton and 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.

Land restoration is already underway. You might see sheep or cattle grazing the wet meadows ahead and to your right.

Building on Charles Rothschild's legacy, this part of the lost fens is now being restored.

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



Photo: Charles Rothschild in front of the Bungalow, c1920

Great Fen team:

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

The National Nature Reserve is managed by Natural England. Any enquiries directly relating to the reserve please phone 01487 812363

This trail guide is also available in audio and large print on the Great Fen website and from the Great Fen team.



Large Print

Explore History:



the Bungalow Trail

WOODWALTON FEN

NATIONAL NATURE RESERVE



Bungalow Trail

0.75 miles (1.2km)
about 30 mins



Extension of Bungalow Trail

Great Fen View
0.6 miles (1km)
about 25 mins



This trail is Heritage Lottery Funded

The Great Fen is delivered by:



www.greatfen.org.uk