How the Trust cares for this reserve

The wet grassland found at the Wader Flats and Townholme Meadows is important for grazing wigeon and other wintering wetland birds who like to have a clear view of their surroundings. To prevent it from developing into dense willow scrub the areas are managed with a mix of cutting and grazing. Removing the tree growth also allows marginal vegetation to develop which is invaluable to invertebrates, feeding birds and others who use it for cover. The mature scrub around the Ring Res and Corner Lake is maintained as it provides shelter and an important food source for small mammals and a wide variety of hedgerow birds.

Islands have been created on the Dragonfly and Otter Lakes to provide suitable areas for breeding water birds. Scrapes have also been created around the edge of Dragonfly Lake to improve the transition from open water to wet grassland which is favoured by waders and wildfowl. Ditches are periodically cleared, encouraging water plants to grow.

Other activities

Dogs are welcome on the reserve but must be kept under close control at all times. Please clean up after your dog. Bins have been provided along the cycle path and old railway line.

Angling is permitted at The Ring Res and Corner Lakes only. A membership is required from the Irthlingborough Angling Club (01933 650110) and you must have a valid rod licence from the Environment Agency (www.gov.uk).

How to get there

OS grid reference SP 953 699. Irthlingborough is 5 miles from Wellingborough. At the A45/A6 roundabout take the A6 exit to Irthlingborough. At the next roundabout take the first exit onto Station Road. When you come to a mini roundabout in the town centre take the first exit onto Church Street and then an immediate right into the town centre car park. There is a short walk downhill past the church along St Peter’s Way to the reserve entrance.

www.wildlifebcn.org/wildlife/reserves

We hope you enjoy your visit

Access

The site has two major access routes; one footpath along the old railway line which connects Ditchford in the west to Stanwick Lakes in the east, and the hard-surfaced cycle way between Irthlingborough and Higham Ferrers. There is also a circular surfaced path around The Ring Res. Other public footpaths throughout the reserve are variable underfoot. Some sections of path may be flooded after heavy rain.

www.wildlifebcn.org
Welcome to Irthlingborough Lakes and Meadows

At the heart of the Nene Valley, Irthlingborough Lakes and Meadows nature reserve is a wonderful stretch of flooded gravel pits and wet grassland, now a hugely valuable wetland for birds and other wildlife.

The area was quarried for gravel until the late 1990s and has been owned and managed by the Wildlife Trust since 2012. The reserve contains a mixture of habitats including scrub, open water, reedbed and grassland. The Ring Res and Corner Lake found at the south-western end of the reserve are dominated by fairly dense willow and marsh vegetation while the newer Grebe and Otter Lakes at the opposite end are more open with a fringe of wetland plants. The varied nature of the site is reflected in the wildlife which makes its home here, in particular the variety and number of wildfowl and other water birds that visit during the winter. As a result, much of the site (along with other gravel pits in the area) is considered to be internationally important and forms part of the larger Upper Nene Valley Gravel Pits Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Protection Area (SPA).

What to look for

The variety of habitats throughout the reserve provide homes for many different species and there is something of interest to see all year round.

Spring - Summer

The first signs of spring appear as the days begin to lengthen with the willow and blackthorn coming into bloom. Some of these early flowering shrubs are an important source of nectar for the first bumblebees and brimstone butterflies as they begin to emerge from hibernation, as well as flowers such as cuckoo flower. Migrant birds including chiffchaff and willow warbler start to arrive, having flown from the Mediterranean and northern Africa to spend the warmer months here.

The arrival of swifts heralds the onset of summer as they return here to breed from their wintering grounds in Africa. Summer is also a great time for flowers. Great burnet, water mint and meadowsweet are among those that thrive here in the meadows and wet grasslands, attracting butterflies such as range-tip and common blue. You will see many types of dragonfly and damselfly, including hairy dragonfly and banded demoiselle, hovering over the lake edges and ditches hunting for insects. Also look out for grass snakes basking in the sun.

Autumn - Winter

Fieldfare and redwing arrive from colder northern climes and are attracted by the fruit-rich hedgerows which help rebuild their strength after their long flight. Other winter visitors include redshank, snipe and lapwing – they head for the exposed muddy shorelines around the Grebe and Otter Lakes where they forage for food.

The numbers of wildfowl build as autumn turns to winter – look out for groups of tufted duck, gadwall and wigeon on the lake and on the adjacent grassland which they graze.

At dusk keep an eye out for the barn owl. Although present all year round, this bird is most easily spotted during the winter as it hunts for field voles.

More information

Your local Wildlife Trust BCN protects wildlife and countryside for people to enjoy in Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire. We are a charity dependent on voluntary contributions.

If you would like more information about this reserve, other reserves in Northamptonshire or about how you can support us, please contact:

The Wildlife Trust, Lings House, off Lings Way, Billing Lings, Northampton, NN3 8BE

T: 01604 405285
e: northamptonshire@wildlifebcn.org

Supported by

The National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund
1. Corner Lake
   One of the oldest of the lakes on the site. It has a varied population of fish and is a favourite nesting place for coot and great crested grebe.

2. The Ring Res
   A great spot for fishing. Find out more under ‘Other activities’.

3. Dragonfly Lake
   Large numbers of tufted duck can be seen here particularly over winter.

4. Grebe Lake
   Scraps - shallow areas of water around the lake edges - are great for a wide variety of wildlife and provide important feeding areas for wading birds.

5. Otter Lake
   Islands on the lakes provide areas where there is little disturbance making it ideal for water birds to breed.

6. The Perch
   A great spot for fishing. Find out more under ‘Other activities’.

7. East Pit

8. Getti’s Lake

9. Heron Lake

10. The Sidings
    The site where iron ore was once loaded onto trains bound for South Wales is now a mixture of grassland and young trees.

11. The Brickworks
    Now a field of mixed scrub and grassland frequented by cuckoos in summer, this was once the site of a Victorian brickworks and probable route of a roman road.

12. Wader Flats
    Floodplain meadows with typical flowers such as great burnet in summer provide winter feeding grounds for many ducks and wading birds. Look out for grazing animals in the summer which help to increase wildlife diversity on the site.

13. Townholme Meadows
    Low lying meadows which flood readily in winter and provide a favourite spot for flocks of lapwings and golden plover.

14. Station Field

15. Draper’s Corner

Doggy Dips – Areas where dogs can jump in the water for a swim.