

The Dragonfly Trail

(blue signs) 1.2 km
Approx 30 minute
circular walk



1 Wet Meadow

In front of you is a field which is a traditionally managed wet hay meadow. A wide range of plants are now recolonising and it is particularly attractive just before its annual cut in July. Marsh marigolds are the first to bloom in spring followed by common knapweed, water horsetail and tubular water-dropwort. Watch out for birds of prey including sparrowhawk, kestrel and buzzard.

2 Reen Teems

Under the bridge here is a deep ditch, known locally as a "reen", which is teeming with invertebrates. The reserve is exceptionally rich in water beetles including the great diving beetle and the great silver beetle. There are also many other insects such as froghoppers, reed beetles and weevils living in the bulrush, reed sweet-grass, water horsetail, woody nightshade and yellow iris along the banks. Ground beetles forage on the mud whilst reens also provide habitat for larvae of a wide range of flies, including the snail-killing flies which parasitise pond-snails. You will notice a poplar tree to your right which supports a large crop of mistletoe.



3 Pleasant Pasture

The field to your left is a rough pasture, full of sedges and rushes. It is grazed in summer by cattle, which leave a coarse sward with wet grassland flowers such as lesser spearwort and greater bird's-foot trefoil.

In winter, these meadows are very good for common snipe and the occasional jack snipe.

4 Dazzling Dragonflies

On sunny days from spring through to autumn you will undoubtedly see several species of dragonflies and damselflies. You will notice the tall spikes of the purple loosestrife alongside the reen here during the warmer months of the year.

5 Butterfly Bonanza

The field to your left is home to hundreds of butterflies that feed on the plants here. You will probably see the orange tip in spring, whilst meadow brown is the commonest species later in summer.



Take a right turn here to visit the Bird Hide or continue straight on to explore the rest of the reserve.

6 The Pond and Bird hide

Looking out of the hide you will see a large bed of common reed which provides cover for many of the bird species present such as mallard, coot, moorhen, water rail and kingfisher. Little grebe breed here every spring and little egrets are now regular visitors. Teal appear in winter, and they are sometimes joined by gadwall and shoveler. Rarities recorded here in the past include bittern, American bittern, night heron, spotted crane and garganey.

7 Reen Management

The reens on the reserve are dredged every few years to maintain open water. Along recently cleared reens a wide variety of plants can be seen including up to five different species of duckweed. Wild angelica and the poisonous hemlock water-dropwort are reen-side plants which provide an important source of nectar for insects.

Turn left to continue on the Dragonfly Trail or follow the boardwalk straight ahead to join the Butterfly Trail through the Meadow.

8 The Willow Walk

As you walk along you will notice pollarded willows (cut back at head height). They were used in the past to produce thin shoots for basket weaving and hurdles out of reach of grazing livestock. Pollards are great habitat for fungi and invertebrates such as the musk beetle – a stunning green longhorn beetle whose grubs bore into the branches of the willows.

To the right of the boardwalk is an area of coppiced willow. These trees are cut right down to the base every few years, with the vigorous regrowth providing another supply of thin shoots a few years later.

Go through the kissing gate to Point 9.

9 Otter Spotters

Otter tracks and spraints (droppings) are often found here – proof that they are active on the Marsh. Otters were driven to the brink of extinction in Britain, due mainly to past water pollution, but have now made a strong recovery.

During the summer, if you look from the bridge you may see a floating plant with kidney-shaped leaves. Its flowers have three white petals. This is a rare plant called frogbit. In autumn its leaves die and it sinks to the bottom of the reen where it remains until new growth in the following spring gives it buoyancy once more.

Turn left and follow the path.

10 Living History

If you look carefully you can see Magor church and Priory to your left and Lower Grange Farm in the distance to your right. It is said that the monks walked across the marsh between the farm and the priory everyday. They are probably responsible for the very distinct line of willow (also called grey willow) to your left. They are believed to have laid willow branches as a primitive board walk, which sprouted to give the long-established belt of willows we see today.



11 Draining the Land

The Romans made a drainage system here to increase agricultural productivity but the present layout of the reens is thought to date back to the 14th Century. We still manage the water level using the sluices that you can see here, but now we use them to maintain the high water level to stop the underlying peat (up to 15ft deep in places) from drying out. You may spot a grey heron in the fields here.

The Butterfly Trail



A The Reedbeds

The dense stands of reeds and other tall fenland vegetation provide nest sites for sedge, reed and Cetti's warblers as well as reed buntings. Look out for the flowers of hemp agrimony and bittersweet.

B Wet Woodland Home

This wet willow woodland is a shady spot on a hot summers day and home to a family of foxes. It is dominated by crack willow along with alder, osier and willow. It provides habitat for scarce moths. Listen out for woodpeckers hammering on the trees here.

C Grazed Meadows

Please walk close to the fence line to your left as there are a number of rare and sensitive plants in this field.

The meadows here are rich in colour during the warmer months of the year. In spring you will see the pale pink lady's smock, followed by knapweed, tormentil and meadow thistle later in the summer. The dampness also allows lesser spearwort, ragged robin (once a common wetland plant but easily lost when the land is fertilised and drained for agriculture), greater bird's-foot trefoil and rushes to grow. This is also great place for looking at butterflies such as meadow brown, ringlet, green-veined white, orange tip, small copper, small skipper and common blue.

D Swanning Around

A couple of pairs of mute swans now breed successfully on the reserve each year. A pair are frequently seen along this stretch of reen. Take care not to get too close!

The more open grazing marsh beyond these fields is also very rich in wildlife, and Gwent Wildlife Trust is managing part of this area to encourage breeding lapwing.

When you've finished looking at this wonderful meadow go through the kissing gate and walk along the reen to join the Dragonfly Trail again at Point 9.



KEY

- Dragonfly Trail
- Butterfly Trail

Magor Marsh Country Code

- Do not pick any flowers or fungi on the reserve
- For your safety, keep to the marked paths and trails
- Keep children under control - the water is deep!
- Leave gates as you find them
- Sorry - dogs are not allowed on the site due to sensitive wildlife.

Cod Cefn Gwlad Cors Magwyr

- Peidiwch â chasglu unrhyw flodau neu ffyngau yn y warchodfa
- Er eich diogelwch eich hun, cadwch at y llwybrau sydd wedi'u marcio
- Cadwch blant dan reolaeth - mae'r dŵr yn ddwfn!
- Gadewch y gatiâu fel y cawsoch chi nhw
- Ni chaniateir i gŵn ddod i'r safle oherwydd y bywyd gwyllt sensitif.



The reserve is flat but there are steps and uneven ground in places, whilst some of the paths can be wet and marshy, so sturdy waterproof footwear is advised. The path and recycled plastic boardwalk from the centre allows wheelchair users to share the joys of the reserve up to the bird hide (follow trail posts 1-6).



Mae'r warchodfa yn wastad, ond ceir grisiau a thir anwastad mewn manau, a gall rhai o'r llwybrau fod yn wlyb ac yn gorslyd, felly fe'ch cyngorir i wisgo esgidiau cadarn sy'n dal dŵr. Mae'r llwybr a'r llwybr plastig wedi'i ailgylchu o'r canol yn galluogi defnyddwyr cadeiriau olwyn i rannu pleserau'r warchodfa hyd at y drydedd guddfan adar (dilynwch arwyddion 1-6 ar y llwybr).

Magor Marsh is open all year round and we run many events and walks here throughout the year.

A copy of our events guide is available free of charge by phoning our head office on **01600 740600**.

