

GATESHEAD'S COUNTRYSIDE SITES



Shibdon Pond, Local Nature Reserve
Ryton Willows, Local Nature Reserve
Stargate Ponds and Bewes Hills
Longacre Wood

Enjoying Gateshead's Countryside

Over half of Gateshead is made up of countryside with mature woodlands, ponds riverbanks and wildflower meadows that have been around, often unchanged for hundreds of years. The Council cares for many countryside sites that provide opportunities for the local community to enjoy the outdoors, watch wildlife and escape from the everyday routine.



Shibdon Pond Local Nature Reserve

The reserve consists of a large pond, marsh, grassland and scrub areas. The marked trail starts in the car park of Blaydon Swimming Pool.

Ryton Willows Local Nature Reserve

Between old Ryton Village and the River Tyne, exploring Ryton Willows will bring you in touch with the wildlife and history of the riverside, open spaces, woodlands and ponds.

Longacre Wood

Hidden between the A1 at the Angel of the North and the main railway line this is Gateshead's best bluebell wood with three ages of woodland to explore. May is the best time to visit if you want to see the bluebells.

Stargate Ponds and Bewes Hills

Besides the A695 at Stargate roundabout, this is an area of grassland and wildlife rich ponds.

Bird Hides

Shibdon Pond has one of 6 hides on Gateshead's countryside sites. For more information contact Thornley Woodlands Centre.



Please follow the Countryside Code and...

- Be considerate to all other users.
- Cyclist must slow down and give way to walkers and horse riders.
- Horse riders must give way to pedestrians.
- Dog owners must keep their dogs under close control and 'scoop the poop'!
- Protect plants and animals and take your litter home.
- Be aware of grazing livestock.

At various sites there will be grazing livestock on the grassland. These are to keep the tough and vigorous grasses at bay and allow wild flowers to flourish the following summer. If livestock is present please keep dogs under close control and do not feed the animals or it will encourage them to follow you.

WATER SAFETY

Rivers and ponds may look safe but they can be dangerous. Hazards like hidden currents, deep water, sudden drops, rubbish, reeds and thin ice on water can cause serious accidents. The best way to keep out of trouble is not to enter the water at all.

BE AWARE OF THE DANGERS!

Shibdon Pond

History

In the nineteenth century this site had been a series of wetland pastures, but this changed when twentieth century mining and railway activities altered the water level and formed the pond. Between 1837 and 1951 Blaydon Main Colliery dominated the site. The capped shaft can still be seen behind Blaydon Swimming Pool.

Birds

Bird life varies throughout the year. From the observation hide you will be able to spot common birds such as tufted duck, mallard, coot and moorhen. In summer, masses of insects swarm above the pond and these can attract swifts, swallows, house martins and sand martins in large numbers. Look carefully around the edge of the pond and you should see grey herons and water rail as they search for food.

In autumn, kingfisher can be seen regularly along with waders such as greenshank and common sandpiper. During cold winters numbers on the pond are boosted by visiting wildfowl from Northern Europe. In past years, a wide range of scarce species from Europe and further afield have been noted including laughing gull and green winged teal from North America, ferruginous duck from the Mediterranean and glaucous gull and Iceland gull from the edge of the Arctic Circle. Also at this time cormorants roost on the main island on the pond in large numbers.

Marsh

The marsh is a mosaic of reed beds and open pools which provide nest sites for birds such as sedge warbler and are ideal cover for otters visiting from the River Tyne.

Where the marsh merges into grassland orchids can be seen during the summer months. The most obvious insect life is the dragonflies, damselflies and butterflies. In spring, look out for the orange tip butterfly and in summer the small skipper and meadow brown butterflies, common darter dragonfly and emerald damselfly. Heather, knapweed and yellow rattle are typical plants which grow here.

Reclaimed Site

This area used to be a refuse dump, but careful planting and management of native British trees will ensure a rich new habitat for the future.

The grassland provides habitat for voles and shrews which attract hunting kestrels.

Scrub

Beyond the marsh areas of scrub provide cover for many birds such as whitethroat and willow warbler during the summer months.

Predators such as foxes are attracted to this area by the large number of rabbits which live here.



Ryton Willows

History

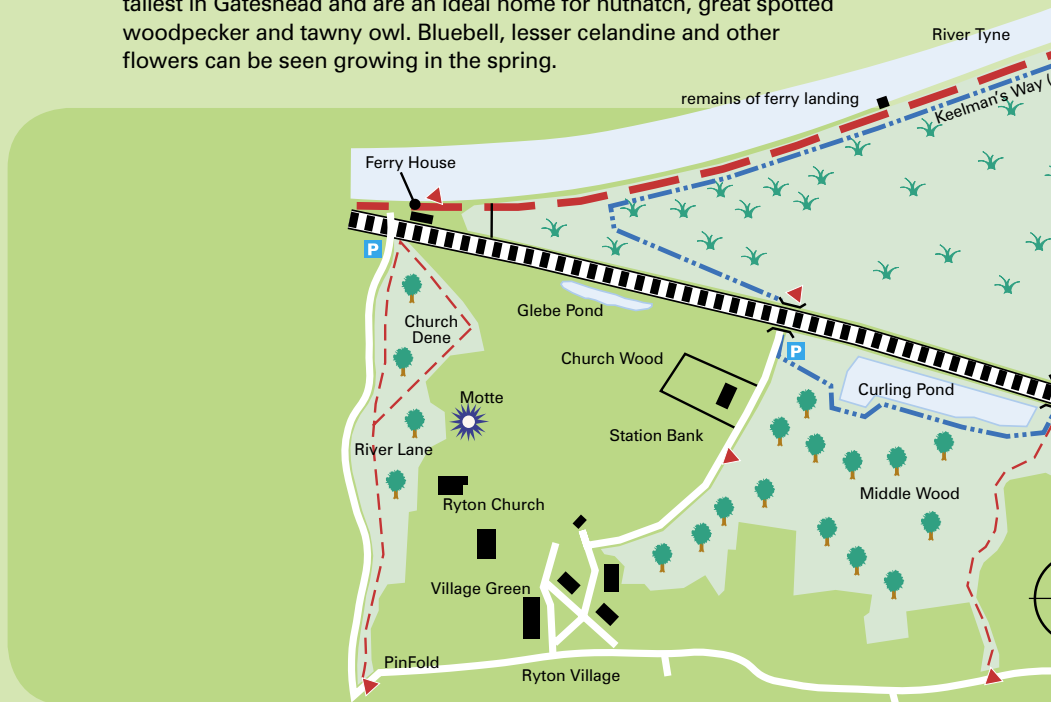
Between Station Bank and the Curling Pond you will find a small piece of brickwork beside the path. These bricks are the only visible remains of a specially built ice rink which was last used by the Newcastle Caledonia Curling Club at the beginning of World War II. In Edwardian times, the main part of the Willows was the site of a mini fairground with roundabouts, 'shuggy boats' and a café. There were also boats to hire on the ponds.

Ponds

The ponds at Ryton Willows are Sites of Special Scientific Interest because they have a very rich flora and fauna. Summer is the time to go out and see the colourful dragonflies and damselflies. During spring, watch out for frogs and toads that will be coming to the ponds to spawn. Underneath the surface is a world of dragonfly nymphs, mayfly larvae, water scorpions, great diving beetles and even leeches!

Woodland

The beech trees on the slope of Middle Wood are thought to be the tallest in Gateshead and are an ideal home for nuthatch, great spotted woodpecker and tawny owl. Bluebell, lesser celandine and other flowers can be seen growing in the spring.



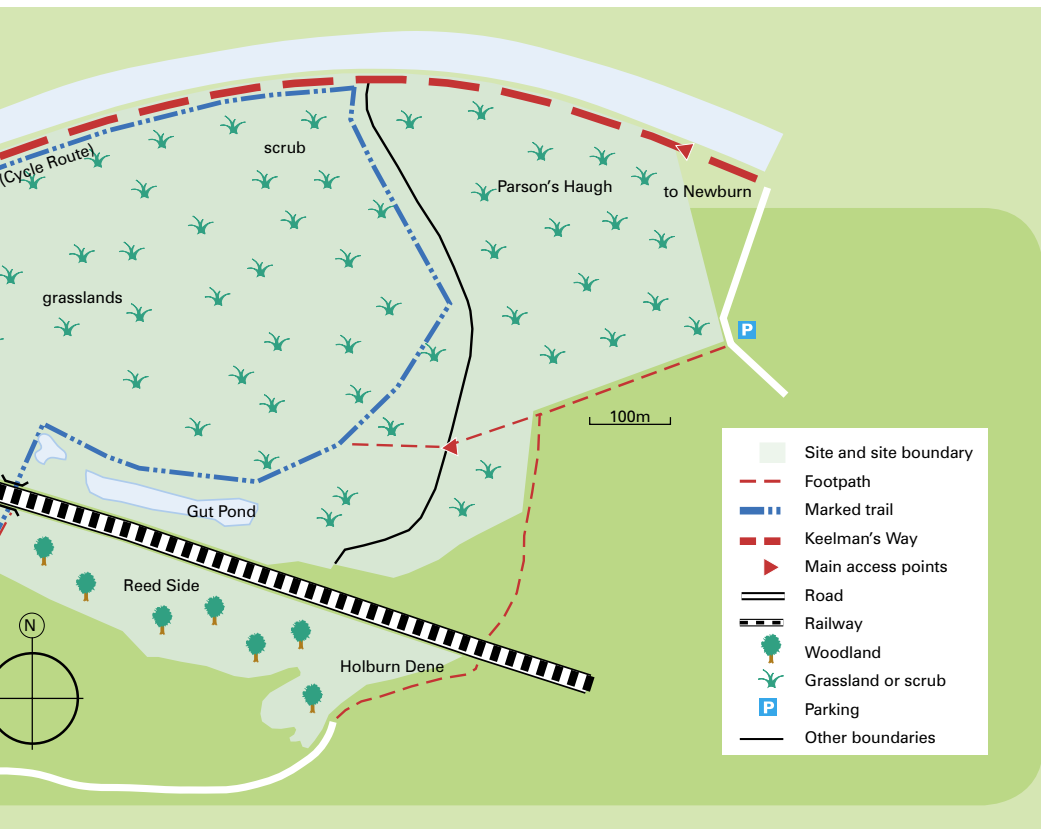


Grassland

Flowers such as harebell and common sorrel can be found growing on the dry sandy soil of the grassland, where meadow brown and small copper butterflies fly on sunny summer days. Birds such as linnet and yellow hammer breed in the gorse.

The River Tyne

Despite being 17 miles (27 km) from the sea, the Tyne is still tidal at Ryton. As a consequence of this, the water is slightly salty and this influences the flowers growing on the bankside. Look out in summer for the purple-blue heads of sea aster. Common seals are frequently seen up the river, attracted by the wide range of fish, including salmon. Birds to see along the river include grey heron, kingfisher and goosander.



Longacre Wood

History

Longacre Wood is a fragment of woodland that was once part of the Ravensworth Estate and has managed to survive the development of national road and rail links over the centuries. It is a link in a green corridor of other similar sites bringing wildlife from the wider countryside into the urban area. On one side you can see the Tyne Marshalling Yards and main north/south railway line and on the other the route of the A1, perhaps the busiest stretch of road in the north east.



Young Woodland

This wide strip of land was the line of the old A1. The trees here are the youngest on the site. The plants that you will spot along the way are common ones that live in open areas: vetches, wild parsnip and common centaury. This type of habitat is also very good for butterflies in summer, look out for meadow brown and common blue.

Middle Aged Woodland

This part of the woodland was planted about 30 years ago. The ground here is damper than that of the young woodland. Along the open edges you will find spectacular stands of common spotted and northern marsh orchids. The birds seen here include willow warbler, blackcap and whitethroat.

Mature Woodland

You will immediately be struck by the difference that one step makes as you progress through into the mature woodland of, oak, birch, ash and others. In the summer, ferns grow under the mature trees and in the spring, you will find drifts of bluebells ramsons and wood anemone. Bird life includes garden warbler, treecreeper, and chiffchaff.

Management

The large drifts of bluebells are a fragile habitat in the mature woodland and require careful management of the trees to maintain it. Coppicing the hazel and removing a number of mature sycamore trees in future years will help to improve the bluebell population for future visitors to enjoy.



Stargate Ponds and Bewes Hills

History

Stargate Ponds and Bewes Hills is an area reclaimed from former quarrying and opencast activities.

It is an important area for many species of plants, birds and insects that are disappearing from the wider countryside due to development and modern agricultural practices.

Grassland

The grassland supports breeding birds such as skylark, grey partridge and meadow pipit. Important insect populations include butterflies like the aptly named dingy skipper, this butterfly flies from mid May into June and thrives in areas with birds-foot trefoil and areas of bare ground. Another special insect of the bare sandy ground is the green tiger beetle, which can be seen on warm sunny days in early summer. Other grassland insects you may find include the small heath and wall brown butterflies and in mid summer thousands of burnet moths can be seen nectaring on plants like the field scabious and lucerne. In areas of gorse, linnets and yellowhammers may nest. Green woodpeckers are often seen flying up from feeding on the many anthills present.

The whole site contains many plants that are adapted to grow in well drained sandy soils like storks bill which gets its name from its seed pods and birdsfoot a rare and inconspicuous little plant which probably has its county stronghold in this area.

Ponds

Around the ponds and ditches dragonflies like the common darter and migrant hawkler can be seen along with emerald and common blue damselflies. Bird life on the ponds usually includes little grebe and mute swan with kingfisher seen occasionally.

Management

All of these birds, insects and plants are here because of the short flower rich grassland habitat with large areas of bare sandy ground. It is hoped that a mixture of grazing, tree felling and bare ground creation will help the populations thrive for future generations to enjoy.

Due to the important numbers of ground nesting birds on this site it is very important that dogs are kept at heel particularly from April to the end of August.



You may also be interested in...



Contact Information

Thornley Woodlands Centre
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www.gateshead.gov.uk

Great North Forest (G.N.F.)

Longacre Wood is within the G.N.F. This is a major environmental initiative which aims to create well-wooded landscapes for work, recreation, wildlife and education.

Central to its success is involvement and action by local people.

To find out more telephone 01207 524 877



Durham Wildlife Trust Nature Reserves

Shibdon Pond is one of 23 nature reserves owned or managed by DWT. For further information on trust reserves contact Rainton Meadows on 0191 584 3112