

Cuttle Brook

local nature reserve

Thame



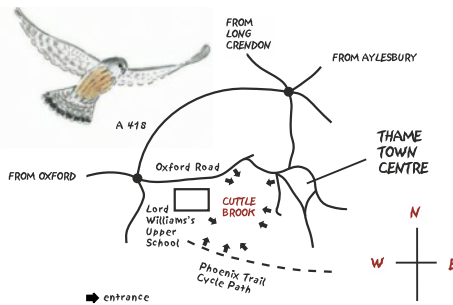
Discover the rich diversity of wildlife on Thame's award-winning nature reserve. A quick, circular walk can take just twenty minutes. If you have an hour or more, there's a network of paths with plenty to see - and it's different every time you visit.

www.cuttlebrook.org.uk



How to find us

The area is open at all times, with nine entrances (➡). It's on the west side of Thame, Oxfordshire, between the Southern Road Recreation Ground, St Joseph's School, Lord Williams's Upper School and The Phoenix Trail. Free parking is normally available by the Scout Hut off Southern Road (see overleaf), Postcode OX9 2DZ, OS Map Ref 702 075



Please keep dogs under control.
Please take your litter with you.
Please leave plants and flowers for others to enjoy.

Map artwork by Gordon Lawson.
Wildlife illustrations by Ruth Webb (birds and plants) and Graham Brandish (insects and frog).
Text and layouts compiled by Barry Gibson (sQuarish productions)
Revised and edited by Dave Watkins in July 2018

The reserve is designated by South Oxfordshire District Council as a Local Nature Reserve, and is owned by Thame Town Council.
Leaflet sponsored by Thame Town Council.



Can I help?

Yes! The Cuttle Brook Conservation Volunteers meet twice monthly (at 10am on the 3rd Sunday and last Wednesday each month) to share hands-on tasks such as mowing paths, improving access for all, building or maintaining boardwalks and bridges, creating seats, 'laying' hedges, protecting reed beds, tree planting, pollarding, pond clearing - whatever needs doing - physical but fun!

There are plenty of opportunities for bird-watching, making surveys of plants and wildlife, and taking photographs and videos. But you don't need to be an expert. Come and be inspired by Cuttle Brook as a resource for the arts, or just to enjoy its beauty, variety, freedom, peace and quiet.



If you or your organisation would like to join as volunteers, or to use the reserve for single or regular events, you can contact us at info@cuttlebrook.org.uk or Thame Town Hall OX9 3DP (01844 212833).

The reserve is always open but we'd love to know how you use it and what you think. You can find us at cuttlebrook.org.uk, and follow the links to Facebook and Twitter.

Welcome to Cuttle Brook

Thame's local nature reserve

What is Cuttle Brook?

With several different habitats in one easy-to-stroll site, it's a unique piece of 'semi-wild' countryside free from roads but just a few minutes walk from Thame Town Centre - a delightful 'green lung' for the area. Meandering right through the reserve is a tributary of the River Thame called the 'Cuttle Brook', which springs to life in the Chilterns. The whole area now offers superb, open river-meadow views and a network of paths through about thirty acres of mixed meadows, woodland, sedge and reed beds, hedges, trees, riverbanks and scrub-land.



What's the history?

Used over centuries for grazing (especially on the way to Thame's traditional cattle market) there are also signs of the mediaeval 'open field' ploughing system, with its 'ridge and furrow' humps and bumps. The site was purchased by Thame Town Council in 1978. To protect the nationally scarce flood-plain of wet grasslands, the area became designated as a Local Nature Reserve in 1995. It is now managed for nature conservation, much of the work being done by 'Cuttle Brook Conservation Volunteers'.

Always changing

Every visit to Cuttle Brook is an adventure, each season offering its own mystery and variety - the first flowers of spring, the meadows in a summer haze, the colours in the autumn and the frosts of winter.

With regular improvements to increase the richness of our wildlife habitats for the future, it's a fascinating learning environment for children, students and all of us.

We hope you enjoy your visit and come back again.

A few birds to spot

- Goldfinch
- Greater spotted woodpecker
- Green Woodpecker
- Grey Heron
- Kestrel
- Kingfisher
- Long-tailed tit
- Red Kite
- Reed Bunting
- Snipe
- Song thrush
- Sparrowhawk
- Spotted flycatcher
- Tawny Owl
- Yellowhammer



Just a few plants

- Coltsfoot
- Comfrey
- Corncockle
- Cowslip
- Creeping cinquefoil
- Dog rose
- Lesser celandine
- Marsh marigold
- Meadow cranesbill
- Ragged robin
- Rosebay willowherb
- Scarlet pimpernell
- ..and four species of Orchid



Some butterflies and moths

- Brimstone
- Comma
- Common blue
- Green-veined white
- Hummingbird hawk-moth
- Large white
- Marbled white
- Meadow brown
- Orange-tip
- Peacock
- Red underwing
- Ringlet
- Small copper
- Small heath
- Small tortoiseshell



Some other insects

- Damsel flies
- Devil's coach horse beetle
- Dragonflies
- Great diving beetle
- Meadow grasshopper
- Oak bush cricket
- Pond skater
- Speckled bush cricket
- Water scorpion
- Whirligig beetle



A few other animals

- Badger
- Bat
- Bullhead
- Chub
- Dace
- Fox
- Frog
- Grass snake
- Loach
- Otter
- Pike



Cuttle Brook, Thame

local nature reserve

The Family Area

Surrounded by willow trees and a hedge, a good place to watch the colours changing with the seasons. Look across the valley to trees and shrubs on the east side, or look south west to the wildflower meadows. An attractive spot by a bend in the river, it's usually quiet enough to hear leaves whispering and the water babbling. Often used for arts projects such as sculpture, open air theatre, storytelling... and picnics!

West Meadows

A fascinating group of meadows, each with its own character and community of plants. Cutting for hay encourages a good variety of grasses, which mingle with familiar meadow flowers like ox-eye daisy, buttercup, clover and meadow-pea (at their peak in May and June) and perhaps the odd rarity. The meadows are also a great place to find grasshoppers and butterflies throughout the summer. Closer to the river bank, watch out for fish, mallard and moorhens in the water. Also for a huge willow leaning over the river (planted by William Cox, a local farmer over 100 years ago).

Cox's Wood

A low-lying woodland planted in 1995 with native species such as oak, ash, alder, birch, hornbeam, field maple and cherry, all growing rapidly. There's a diagonal 'ride' through the wood. Close to the houses, thickets of hawthorn and blackthorn provide food and shelter for birds and good foraging for shrews and voles. Hedges around the wood are laid in rotation, to increase scope for nesting sites - look out for other hedges being managed in this traditional way. Cox's wood is particularly good for spiders, harvesters and damp loving insects, such as the 'devil's coach horse' beetle.

Nontron Meadows

Once just parkland, this space is now managed to attract a greater variety of grasses, flowers such as 'Lady's Smock', birds and insect life. At the Spring Path bridge, you can watch the flow of the stream and perhaps catch a glimpse of a pike, a grey wagtail or even a kingfisher. In 2017 the Volunteers dug a channel into the meadow. Fed by the brook, this provides a refuge for young fish.

The Pond

Created in 1996, it's different every time you visit. As you approach the pond, keep an eye open for swimming grass-snakes - you might be lucky! On the surface you may spot dragonflies hovering, pond skaters and water lilies. There's also a pond-dipping platform, to discover water-boatmen, diving beetles, tadpoles, frogs and much more. Please put them back! In the boggy area beside the pond look out for yellow iris ('flags') and teasels.

The Overview

From the playing fields entrance by the wooden welcome sign, you can view several wildlife habitats - rough meadow down the valley slope, hedges, woodland and the nationally scarce wet, flood-plain grassland. The Cuttle Brook itself runs right through the landscape in a huge curve. As you approach the river, watch out for signs of moles!

Old Tip Wood

Planted with native species at the same time as Cox's Wood, this is a much drier area (in earlier times, Thame's town 'tip') favoured by trees like ash, rowan and birch. There are also larches, firs and scots pine. Some of the birches have a striking white bark. A good area for goldfinches, spiders and minibeasts, watch out too for numerous 'banded snails', which seem to like the huge groups of escaped horseradish!

The Railway Bridges

A good place to look out over the reserve and find wildlife associated with scrub land - black-thorn, honeysuckle, dog-rose and rosebay willow-herb. Listen for babbling water and dunnocks (especially south of the river in 'The Triangle'). In 2005, the 'Phoenix Trail' (a shared-use cycle path forming a link from Princes Risborough to Oxford as part of the Sustrans National Cycle Network) was extended to include this section of old railway line.

The Wooden Bridge

A patch of coltsfoot here is one of the first flowers to bloom in Spring. Look out for waterside plants like reed mace (false bulrush), common winter cress (many shades of green) and purple comfrey (pale purple in this part of the reserve, dark elsewhere). Dragonflies often patrol here. Popular for Pooh-sticks, the bridge was designed and built by the Cuttlebrook Conservation Volunteers in 2013.

Wetland Areas

A haven for wetland plants like marsh marigold, pussy willow, meadowsweet, rushes (three kinds - soft, hard and jointed) and sedge. Sedges are the plants with triangular stems. The volunteer group maintains them with regular cutting. There's also a boardwalk, providing access to the south side, protecting the fragile sedge-bed environment and if you're quiet, perhaps giving glimpses of specialised birds like reed bunting and grasshopper warbler.

