

Fleet Pond is one of Hampshire's hidden gems. At 21 hectares (52 acres), it is Hampshire's largest fresh-water lake. The Reserve's reedbeds, marshes, heathland and woodland provide sanctuary for a rich community of animal and plant life, including many that are no longer to be found in an ordered, farmed countryside. The total area of the Reserve is 57 hectares (141 acres) of which 48 hectares (118 acres) is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). This applies to the wetlands, the lake and the dry heathland.



Fleet Pond was probably created by the deliberate damming of natural watercourses draining a wide area of heath and woodland. In excess of 2,000 species of plants and animals live in or visit the Reserve. Most of the common mammals are present, together with the common amphibians and reptiles. Almost 250 species of birds, 12 kinds of fish, more than 400 types of flowering plant and 250 species of fungi have been recorded.

Reproduced courtesy of RAF Odiham



Whatever your reason for visiting the Reserve, we hope that you will find plenty to interest you, and that you will enjoy your visit.

For further information about Fleet Pond and about Fleet Pond Society please feel free to contact any of the following:



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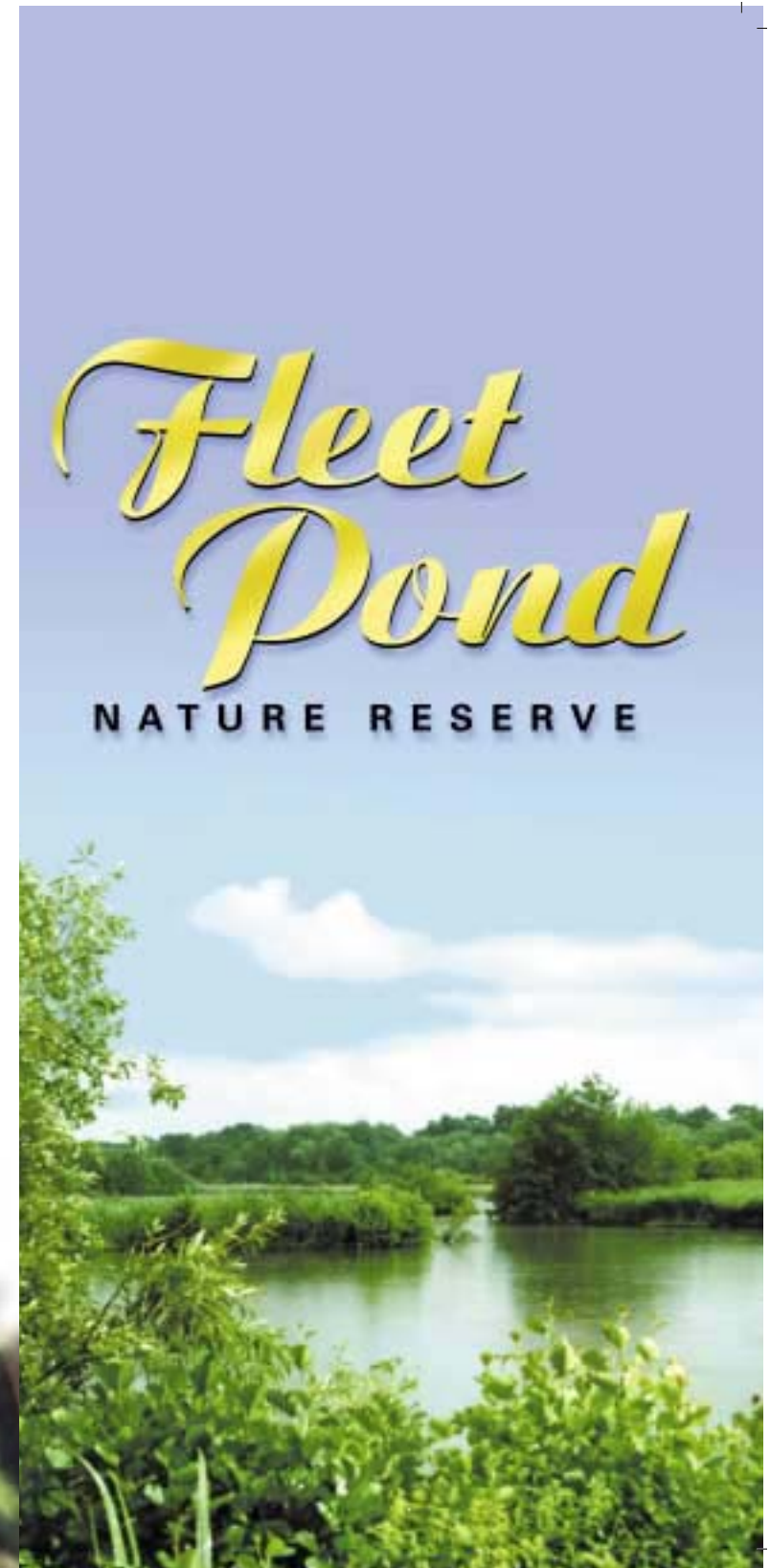


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Fleet Pond

NATURE RESERVE

The Lake

Fleet Pond is known to have been a thriving fishery by 1324 and was constructed much earlier. Historic uses are responsible for the name "Pond" rather than "lake"; first as a fish pond and later as a millpond for Fleet Mill.



Stocked with fish, the "pond" supplied much needed winter food for the surrounding farms and villages.

The most common birds are Mallard ducks, Canada geese, moorhens and coots. You will see great crested grebes

and cormorants fishing. Cormorants need to dry out regularly, with wings outstretched, between fishing trips. Grey herons are regulars all year as is the shy kingfisher. In summer you might see a common tern, a delicate white bird with a forked tail and sharp pointed wings, diving after fish from flight.

Around the lake edge look for marsh marigold (kingcup), meadowsweet, water mint, tall

waterdock and water forget-me-not.

On a summer's evening you will be entertained by pipistrelle and Daubenton's bats as they hunt insects over the lake. Fishing jetties are ideal bat observation platforms.



The Heathland Areas

Fleet Pond's heathland is a tiny fragment of the 8,300ha (20,500 acres) of open heathland Hampshire still retained in 1800. Locally, heathland stretched from Crondall through to Yateley. Grazing by sheep, ponies and cattle kept this extensive heathland open.

The soil on the Dry Heath is sandy, drains readily and is rich in heathland plants.

The most noticeable are ling and bell heather and the gorse that flourish in the open area. Look out for

butterflies and bees that enjoy the nectar of the heathland plants. On a quiet day you might catch a glimpse of Roe deer in the woodland edge, rabbits grazing the heather or a shrew busily hunting insects.



Wood Lane Heath is a wet heathland. In July and August it is purple with flowering ling and cross-leaved heather. You might catch a sight of the Roe deer feeding on the young shoots of molinia (purple moor grass) and birch saplings. Jays can usually be seen in the bordering woodland as can most of the woodland edge birds: blackbirds, thrushes, chaffinches and blue and great tits.



The Reedbeds

Reedbeds are a habitat made rare by the drainage of Hampshire's wetlands for building and farming. Fleet Pond's reedbeds are predominantly phragmites reed, but you will also see the brown, sausage-shaped seed heads of greater and lesser reedmace. They support a special diversity of wildlife. In spring, reed warblers return from their migration to nest. They are easier to hear than see.

Their churring song can be heard among the reeds. The reed bunting is bolder; the male with his black head and white "moustache" often sings from willow or alder saplings in the reeds.

In winter the very rare bittern visits to feed in the reedbeds attracting many birdwatchers.

The Marshes

The marshland supports a rich diversity of wetland plants. Purple and yellow loosestrife, marsh lousewort, the rarer marsh cinquefoil and many different rushes and sedges are included. These support many different insects, spiders and snails, which in turn provide food for birds, small mammals, frogs and toads. The marshes support Fleet Pond's two snakes. The grass snake is a good swimmer and finds most of its prey in wetland areas. The adder, more usually associated with dry habitat, is often found hunting in the wetlands where it is less likely to be disturbed by people and dogs.





Fleet Pond

NATURE RESERVE

Woodlands

Woodland occupies about 16 ha (40 acres) of the reserve. There are two basic types:

Wet Woodland

Alders and willows are the dominant species. Alder trees produce hundreds of seeds in winter, contained in tiny "cones". These are very popular with siskins and redpolls.

Dry woodland

Scots pine, oak and birch are the main trees. Rowan (mountain ash) and stands of coppiced hazel are also found.

The Walks

The recommended walks that are marked by colour-coded posts introduce you to a selection of wildlife habitats. Please keep to the well-used paths.

Short Walk (Red Markers) 1km

The Red Route will take you past The Dry Heath, one of the two open heathland areas, along woodland paths. The Route visits Boathouse Corner with its fishing jetty designed for wheelchair use and the Picnic Site with a good view of the lake, the fringing reedbed and the open marsh.

Please note that the section of path between Boathouse Corner and the Picnic Site is a woodland walk with many tree roots to trip the unwary.

Medium Walk (Yellow Markers) 3km

This route takes a full circuit of the lake. The northern and western footpaths are suitable for wheelchairs and children carriers in all but the wettest weather. Excellent views of the lake can be had from the northern and north-western footpaths and from Chestnut Grove landing stage. The path crosses Brookly Stream, one of the two feeder streams into the lake.

The oldest section of Fleet Pond's woodlands, at Sandhills, has good specimens of oak and Scots pine. A carpet of bluebells appears in early spring. Coldstream Glade attracts butterflies, bees and other insects and Sandy Bay is a popular spot for people, with informal seats and good views. At Sandy Bay, the Gelvert Stream, enters the lake. Near Westover Road access point, you will pass through an open glade and, on a warm sunny day, smell the pungent aroma of bog myrtle.

Long Route (Blue Markers) 4km

This follows the Yellow Route but extends to include Brookly Wood and Wood Lane Heath. Brookly Wood was once a private garden and contains some of the Reserve's best beech trees. There are also "exotics" here: bamboo, rhododendron and laurels. The footpath through Brookly Wood is narrow and can be very muddy in winter.

Wood Lane Heath is a moist heath. Late July and August are the best times to see the heather in flower. The footpath skirts the heath and is informal but firm.

