

Hawley Meadows and Blackwater Park

An easy walk around a large riverside meadow, a woodland pond with some interesting trees. This area is a SANGS.

This is an easy walk with plenty of variations to suit you. The route chosen gets you close to the best part of the river and has some easy break points if you decide you can't fit it all in.

Park at the car park just off the A331 opposite Watchmoor Park Business Park. In spring Blackcaps, Whitethroats and Chiffchaffs will be singing here. Cross the river via the footbridge and turn right. The river is quite lush here and pretty. In summer, Banded Demoiselles are common and flowers like Orange Balsam (common jewelweed) are on the river bank. Often, when its quiet, a Grey Heron will be seen and some Mute Swans, Moorhens also like it here. You pass some Grey Willow on the left before the tall Black Poplars that are quite a feature of the Meadows. There is a lovely view of the clear river and gravel floor soon. Walk on past the end of the hedgerow keeping right on the path staying on the riverbank, not following the path to the left crossing the meadow via the bench. You will soon reach a shady corner where some trees have fallen in the river. Right at the furthest point there is the inflow from Camberley Sewage Works. This is a favoured place for Grey Wagtails that like the tumbling water and the insects that thrive there. Watch for their bobbing tails and undulating flight just above the water or on the banks or concrete plinths.

Follow the path and looking ahead the meadow often holds Snipe in winter here amongst the rushes and they can be easily disturbed. The meadow gets very wet (this is a flood plain) so it's good habitat for them. But you follow the river and turn right through the gate into Blackwater Park.

The river here is quiet and often has duck and moorhens. A few years ago a Yellow-browed Warbler spent some time here in autumn causing a 'twitch'! Chiffchaffs are often heard and seen in winter.

Follow this shady path and soon you should see a pond appear on the left past a stand of bamboo. Take the path on the left after the end of the pond and it begins to turn back. When you are most of the way around the pond a path appears on the right. Take that as it goes through the trees towards the railway line.

This path soon leads through a kissing gate back into Hawley Meadows. You are now between trees and the (quiet) railway line. You can now follow this past all the young trees, bramble and shrubs and see dragonflies, butterflies and meadow flowers for a long stretch. Ignore the left-hand turn options.

When you can go forward no further the path turns left in front of another patch of woodland and you follow this and cross the river bridge and take the gate on the right into a meadow. The path splits at the bench and take the right-hand side keeping close to the river - which is actually Cove Brook at this point. Pass a dense stand of Blackthorn, wild apple, bramble and dog rose on your left. Now you will see Cove Brook passing beneath the railway line and you just stay on the path to the next line of large trees, this time White Poplar with very distinctive bark. The leaves are also very pale and recognisable. After the poplars follow the

path around to the left, with the trees on your right passing a bench in memory of David Pilkington, the founding Chairman of the Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust.

Cross the footbridge and follow the path parallel to the River Blackwater. Often Herons sit on the top of this bridge so approach it carefully for a possible photo opportunity! In late summer here Common Toadflax makes a very pretty carpet in large patches and bees love it. Stay on the path and enter the wooded section with the river full of bulrushes to your right. Kingfishers are possible here, anywhere on the river in fact, but the foliage is dense so they're more likely heard than seen!

A bit further on you reach the gate out of Hawley Meadows. Just before that, turn sharply left past the large poles carrying power lines and follow the narrow path back to the end of the bramble, about 100 metres, and then turn left in front of the wild apple tree. Before you turn you can see some beehives in the distance beyond the fence. You will soon rejoin the path you came on and go back to the bridge, crossing the river and turning right at the hazel bush, this may be laden with nuts in September.

The main path crosses the meadow but one option is to visit the river bank, certainly a worthwhile diversion to collect blackberries in season! The centre of the meadow can be flooded seasonally but there are ways around it. This meadow holds a small population of Great Burnet, a locally rare flower which is nurtured by the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership (BVCP) who manage Hawley Meadows. It also holds more Common Toadflax and many other flowers and insects.

This path leads you back to the gate and bridge you crossed earlier. Re-cross the bridge and turn right heading back to the bridge to the car park but before you do, you will pass where Cove Brook joins Blackwater River. In 2020 we spotted some Water Primrose, a serious pest species here, which requires immediate attention to stop it spreading. BVCP acted immediately on the report.

Although this is a short walk it offers a lot of interest and we hope you enjoy it.