

Savernake and Swinley Parks

A Town Park with a large pond and a stroll through beautiful parkland

Parking should be possible at Savernake Park, Savernake Way, Bracknell, RG12 0XA or nearby roadside. Walk east along Savernake Way towards New Forest Ride B3430. Cross New Forest Ride on the left side of the roundabout and look for the narrow path through the trees up to the pedestrian gate into Swinley Park, land owned by the Crown Estate.

Once inside turn right and follow the wide grassy track and then over the slight hill to the tarmac lane keeping the main road through the trees on your right. This is a lovely example of a mix of deciduous trees of mixed ages, some plainly very old. When you join the tarmac lane there is a cleared harvested area on your left, a new plantation coming, giving a nice open view and one or two very old trees have been left standing. Continuing along the lane there is a mix of trees including some Douglas Fir. These trees and many like them may hold Firecrests; they will almost certainly hold Goldcrests. You will be lucky if you can tell the difference! (I will post some details on our website to help identify them).

You will reach a T junction where you turn right, follow this and ignoring the path sign that points right (this is part of the Three Castles Path – long distance route) you keep on the lane bending left and when the lane splits turn left up the hill on the concrete track into the trees. Stay on this track now for a long time, ensuring where it divides that you keep left.

Along this stretch you will pass an area on the left that is a fairly recent conifer plantation. This is very good habitat for Nightjars, summer visitors that nest on the ground and appear at dusk and make an amazing churring noise. A little further on, the land has been cleared to the right and also looks good habitat for these wonderful birds. Woodlark may also be seen and heard here, especially early in the year e.g. January, February and March. In the wet areas and ditches on the right dragonflies will live in summer. Buzzards and Red Kites will often be seen overhead.

In the distance you will see a gate across the lane and soon before, a sign points you to the left. Follow this track, it can be a bit muddy in the middle, and bend left and carry on until another young conifer plantation appears on your left. Stay on this until a wide track appears on your right, take this track and note the trees planted here are deciduous. This will increase the birdlife, mainly common species like Wrens, Robins, Dunnocks and Blackbirds.

As you reach a crossroads (or crosstracks!) carry on and you will see in front of you many tall old trees. Some of these are hornbeam and oaks and at the top of many there are infestations of the parasitic plant, mistletoe. Mistletoe sucks the moisture and nutrients from the host tree. To a birdwatcher though, this is the place to find mistle thrush, no prizes for guessing where their name came from! They love the berries and have a loud rattling or chattering call. The mistle thrushes spread the seeds by droppings, scraping their beaks on

branches or regurgitating from the crop. This is why you often find localised groups of mistletoe in some trees. At the next crosstracks turn right onto another section of the Three Castles Path. There is some nice wet woodland and large old trees on your left and then a new plantation on your right.

Soon, at the next crosstracks turn left, still on the wide Three Castles Path. Follow this for about 500 metres until you reach a big junction. You need to turn left here but not first left, instead enter the trees ahead of you, note a path coming from the right and you will see a second turning sharp left in the trees. Take this one and it stretches long and straight into the distance. This is almost the 'home straight'!

At the very end of this long stretch start bending left and then look sharp right for a pedestrian gate in the fence, similar to one you entered by. Exit the gate and turn left onto the lane leading to the roundabout. Cross over Wareham Road and continue on the footpath along New Forest Ride. Cross left at the pedestrian crossing and take the path into Savernake Park. This takes you back to your car past the playpark and a pond with a wooded island where there is a good chance of seeing Mandarins usually hiding under the shelter of the branches. You should also see many Moorhen, Mallard, Black-headed Gulls and Canada Geese depending on the time of year.

That's about 4 very pleasant miles I hope you have enjoyed!