

The Moors Lake Trail in Large Print



LOTTERY FUNDED



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Introduction

Hello and welcome! This trail will take you on a short tour around Moors Lake. You can listen for a variety of wildlife.

There is also an audio version and activity sheets for families, which can be downloaded from our website.

The trail is about three quarters of a mile long. There are 7 stopping points, each marked by the audio trail green marker. You can enjoy the most wildlife during the Spring and Summer months, but it is a level route to enjoy at any time of year.



If you have dogs with you, please keep them on a lead and under close control at all times and do not allow them to jump in the river. Thank you.

Start this trail from the Visitor Centre.



As you leave the front doors, turn right, cross the zebra crossing and head over the mound. Follow the path as it skirts the picnic area to the first trail marker near the dragonfly sculpture.

1 – Dragonflies and Damselflies

Moors Valley is one of the best places to see Dragonflies and Damselflies in Britain with 27 species regularly recorded here. That's more than half of the British species and an impressive 80% of those which can be found in Dorset. This is because we have such a wonderful variety of ponds, each providing something to suit the different species.

Although Dragonflies are usually larger than Damselflies, the easiest way to tell the difference between them is to look at their wings:

- Dragonflies cannot fold their wings so even when they are resting they are held out at right angles body**
- Damselflies fold their wings along their body when they rest**

Each of their eyes is made up of as many as 30 thousand facets so they have 360 degree vision!

The Dragonfly Sculpture shows the life cycle of a dragonfly from eggs, laid in the water and their aquatic nymph stage to the flying adults.

The larvae live in the water and as they grow in size, they have to shed their skin between 8 and 16 times. This can take up to 5 years. Then when the larvae are ready, they leave the water by climbing up the water plants. They pump up their body so their larval skin splits open and the young dragonfly pushes itself out of the hole. Emergence can take 2 hours for the wings to fully unfold - during this time they are very vulnerable to predators. The adult dragonflies spend only a few summer months on the wing to complete their life cycle, mate and lay eggs.

The most common species you might see around Moors Lake during the summer months are:

- the Brown Hawker**
- the Common Blue**
- the Red Eyed Damselflies**
- and the Emperor Dragonfly: this is our largest dragonfly with a large blue and green body and a wingspan of up to 10cm.**

There are four main types of dragonfly:

- 1. Hawkers - like the Emperor Dragonfly, are large and fast flying. They whizz around, usually above head height and rarely settle.**
- 2. Chasers - like the 4-spotted Chaser, perch on vegetation and then chase after prey. They are usually seen about 2 feet above the surface of the water.**

- 3. Darters - like the Black Darter, are smaller and more delicate. They sometimes settle on the ground but are more often found perching on leaves or tops of plants.**
- 4. Skimmers - like the Keeled Skimmer, are often seen flying low over the water, just skimming the surface.**

You can purchase a dragonflies and damselflies identification sheet at the Gift Shop in the Visitor Centre.



Continue along the path to the next stopping point, number 2.

2 – Something Fishy

Moors Lake was dug in 1985, primarily to help control flooding along the Moors River. The river, running alongside and feeding into the lake, was designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in 1990, which helps to protect this superb habitat for wildlife.

Moors Lake is used for fishing and by those who want to find a quiet place to sit and enjoy the views and is full of fish that have travelled here via the Moors River.

There are lots of baby fish like Dace and Rudd, due to the slow moving water. They shelter near the edges and under lily pads.

You will also find meat-eating or carnivorous fish like Perch and Pike, who feed on smaller fish.

- **Rudd have a blue-green body with a silvery-white belly and deep red fins.**
- **Perch have a greenish body with black stripes down their sides, a white belly and bright orangey-red, spikey fins.**
- **Pike are ferocious fish with a long striped or spotted body, a large broad head and a huge mouth full of sharp teeth!**



Continue along the path to stopping point 3.

3 – Water Birds

There will always be some water birds on the lake.

Some of our resident species are:

- **Mute Swans**

We always have a breeding pair of Mute Swans which are very territorial birds that will chase invaders off their lake.

They can be aggressive when they have young, called cygnets.

They make a large and impressive nest at the side of the lake, from dried reeds and then lay between 2 and 9 eggs in April or May.

The cygnets stay with their parents until March the following year. Then the parents will chase them away so they can start to rebuild their nest for the next brood.

Although they are called Mute Swans they do make a variety of noises, most commonly hoots or hisses!

- **Coots**

Coots have black feathers and white beaks. They are quite cross birds and are often quarrelling!

- **Moorhens**

Moorhens look very similar but have red and yellow beaks and large yellow feet. They are shy birds and often hide in the reeds. When they are scared they run across the surface of the water to find somewhere to hide.

- **Mallards**

These are very common and the males are identified by their green head. The females are much less colourful so they are camouflaged when sitting on their nest on the banks of the lake. They will have up to 12 fluffy ducklings each Spring.

You will also Black-Headed Gulls and sometimes Grey Herons stand at the water's edge or Cormorants perch in the trees. They both feed on small fish.

If you are especially lucky you might also notice a Kingfisher!



Now continue along the path to the top of the Lake and the next stopping point, number 4.

4 – Water Voles

Although once common, the number of Water Voles has declined dramatically over the last 20 years - mostly due to habitat loss and change through the intensification of agriculture and the invasive American Mink.

The Water Vole population here was eradicated following the release of American Mink, by animal rights activists, from a fur farm in nearby Ringwood. Now the Mink are no longer here and between 2010 and 2012 the Rangers from East Dorset District Council re-introduced Water Voles. Thankfully, we now have a successful breeding population of them.

Water Voles have chestnut-brown fur, a flat nose, small ears and are bigger than other voles. They are secretive and shy, but if they are sitting on the riverbank as you approach, they will jump into the river for safety, so listen for their distinctive ‘plop’ as they enter the water!

Water Voles will eat grass, reeds and rushes. In fact they eat over 2 hundred different species of plants. They create a tunnel in the vegetation from their burrows up the side of the river bank where

they can find food. The river becomes sensitive to flooding as a result of the voles making their burrows in the riverbank.



Now continue to the next stopping point, number 5.

5 – Otters

Otters are a native species to British Waterways, and unlike the American Mink, they can live alongside the Water Voles without harming their population.

Otters have a flat head with a wide muzzle, long streamlined bodies about 1 metre in length and webbed feet with 5 short toes. Their diet is made up of fish, especially eels, but they also eat other animals like rabbits and young water birds. They have incredibly sharp teeth!

They are only found near water, where the roots of the bankside trees make safe places for sleeping and raising cubs. They live solitary lives and only the females will remain with their cubs, teaching them how to swim and fish before they become independent at about a year old. In the late evening you might hear whistling along the river as the mum calls her cubs.



Don't cross over Kings Farm Bridge. Instead keep heading around the lake and past Kingsmere Railway Station to stopping point 6. There is an accessible toilet located in the train station.

6 – Underwater World

Even the smallest of freshwater areas contains a large amount of fascinating water invertebrates. Invertebrates are animals without a backbone and many of them living underwater in this pond are insects. All insects have 3 body parts and 6 legs, just like Dragonflies and Damselflies.

There are several types of insects living on the surface of the pond:

- 1. Water Boatmen – small boat-shaped insects with one pair of longer legs, which they use like oars propelling a rowing boat.**
- 2. Pond Skaters – thin bodies and long legs. They feed on dead or dying insects. They are very agile and can jump to get away from predators.**
- 3. Whirligig Beetles – look like small black dots, constantly moving round in circles and spirals.**

Beneath the surface there are pond snails and other water beetles.

Our rangers run regular pond dipping events during the Summer. Take a look at the Moors Valley website for details.



Continue along the path for a short while until you reach the final stopping point, number 7.

7 – Woodland Birds

You will be able to hear a variety of birds at Moors Valley all year round. Some of the most common birds that you can hear are:

- **Blackbirds - they have a beautiful low singing voice which is very tuneful.**
- **Robins - a song similar to the Blackbird, but a bit higher. Robins are rarely seen or heard during the height of Summer, when they are moulting and become rather reserved.**

At other times they can be heard singing their melodious warbling song, often from quite high up perches.

- **Long-Tailed Tits - have a twittering, trilling song, but it is their high-pitched contact calls that will usually get them noticed. They fly around in flocks twittering continually to one another. When they are in the trees, they busily flit from branch to branch looking for insects. They are very acrobatic and will hang upside-down from the end of branches.**

- **Great Tits** - have a varied song, but it's perhaps best known for its piercing "teacher-teacher" song, which sounds very much like a bicycle pump, and is usually heard in Spring and Summer.
- **Blue Tits** - feed mostly on seeds and insects, especially caterpillars. In springtime they feed also on pollen, nectar and sap, and in the Autumn on berries. They are one of the most agile birds and often hang upside down from branches or bird feeders.
- **The Wren** - one of the smallest birds in Britain, but also one of the loudest with a shrill song which lasts about 5 seconds and usually ends in a trill.
- **Swallows** - visit in the Summer and nest every year in the eaves of our Visitor Centre. They swoop low over the lake to catch insects. Their long tail feathers give them exceptional manoeuvrability.



To complete this trail, follow the path back to the zebra crossing and Visitor Centre. Thank you for visiting.

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