

The Fant Wildlife Area

Maidstone, Kent



•The Fant Wildlife Group is a charity of volunteers from the local community. The aim of the Fant Wildlife Group is to maintain and diversify the wildlife in the Fant Wildlife Area, to encourage educational use and local involvement.

•If you support the aims of the Fant Wildlife Group please become a member.

•Please speak to a member of the Fant Wildlife Group or visit www.fantwildlife.org.uk. Membership is free but we do welcome small donations.

Nature Trail



Pond Skater

Viewpoint 1 - At the pond

Look into the pond. In the summer months you are likely to see Wild Celery, Marsh marigold and white Water Lilly. All the planting in the pond is carefully managed. Only native species have been planted. Most of the wildlife you will find in the pond has arrived naturally. Look on the water to see carnivorous insect like Water Skaters and spiders. In the water you are likely to see Water Boatmen and the larvae of Dragon Flies. If you look very closely you may be lucky enough to see water fleas and shrimps. Eels, Frogs and Newts have also been found in the pond.



Common Frog

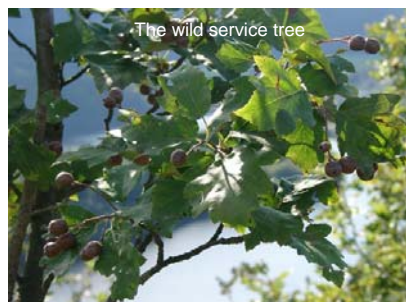
We are very fortunate to have several streams on site as well as the main pond. The streams have encouraged many different waterside tree species, especially Willow. On the slope above the pond there is a plantation of Alders - Britain's most common waterside tree. Below the pond near the path is a Goat Willow tree (an indigenous species). Walk on down the path...



Dragonfly

Viewpoint 2

You have just walked past a clump of Crack Willow. This plant is so called because it cracks during winter storms, is swept downstream and spreads to new habitats. To your right we have planted Oak trees, one for each year the site has been open to the public. In the centre of these Oaks you will find a Service tree. This native of Kent, has small dark red berries.



The wild service tree



Leaves of the Alder tree

Viewpoint 3

As you enter the large grass area, stand still and quite for a few moments. At dusk or dawn you may be lucky enough to see rabbits feeding in the grass. This area of grass has been created to provide a contrasting habitat to the bramble scrub. This open space encourages birds. Since 1996 the number of recorded bird species on site has doubled. As you walk through the site your feet will trample the vegetation which will encourage low growing species to thrive. Every year there is an increase in wildflowers species and the insects which feed upon them. The meadows are cut after they have seeded in the summer. Walk on to the next clearing on the right and up the steps...



Pussy Willow



Dog Rose hips

Viewpoint 4 – At the top of steps

Looking out across the site in the distance you can see Maidstone and beyond that the North Downs. Across the river is Bydews Wood. The Wildlife site provides important habitat for the many birds which nest in Bydews Wood, especially open feeding grounds for Kestrel. The slope on which you stand has, in part, been formed naturally by the River Medway, but also by quarrying to provide stone and soil for the embankment on which the railway now runs. The thorny bush behind you is a Dog Rose which has beautiful flowers in summer and large rose hips in winter. Rose hips are an excellent source of vitamin C and can be used to make rose hip syrup. The steps were built with the help of the Princes Trust. Walk back down the steps and on to the next numbered post...

Viewpoint 5

Above the path we have provided tin sheeting as refuges for insects and small mammals. If you lift these carefully you may find many insect such as and you may even be lucky enough to find slow-worms. A slow-worm is a legless lizard, if you do find one please do not handle it because they shed their tails as a defence mechanism. Large slow worms can bite. Please replace any of the refuges which you move and leave the area as you found it.

Here you will also find a beetle bank which consists of a raised bank sown with tussock forming grasses such as timothy grass. Beetle banks are used to build up bio-diversity and encourage birds.

As you walk on to viewpoint 6 you will pass fruit trees on your left planted by the original allotment keepers who abandoned the site years ago.



Common Kestrel

Viewpoint 6

At the top of the slope at the boundary with the allotments is a hedge planted by the Fant Wildlife group in 1999. This is an example of a mixed hedgerow of hawthorn, field maple and wild rose. The autumn fruits provided by this mixed hedgerow have supported the increasing bird population on site. During the summer months large clumps of Comfrey can be seen in the grass. Comfrey was used as a fertiliser by the original allotment keepers who abandoned the site in the 1950s. Below this view point, near the river, is another large copse of Alders planted by the Wildlife group.



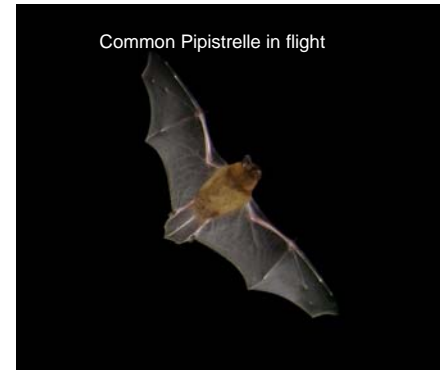
Comfrey flower

Viewpoint 7

Here you can fork left down hill towards viewpoint 8 or turn right and walk slightly uphill into the woodland walk. If you turn right follow the bark path through the trees until you return to the main path at the Unicomes Lane entrance. While walking through the trees in spring time you can enjoy the native blue bells.

Viewpoint 8

On the slope above you is the only area of developed woodland on the site. Sycamore is the main species in this woodland. Sycamore is not native to Britain and was introduced in the 16th Century. It spreads very easily using its 'helicopter' seeds to travel over large distances. Sycamore grows freely and vigorously and needs careful management. On the trees here you will see bird boxes, some of which have been opened up by woodpeckers. The closed boxes are for bats. Each box can hold up to 50 bats! The most abundant bat species in the UK is the Common Pipistrelle. The bats enter the box by climbing up through a small slit at the bottom.



Common Pipistrelle in flight

We hope you enjoyed this brief guide to the site. If you walk on you can follow the woodland trail created by the Princes Trust in 2004. If you have any suggestions to help us to improve this guide please let us know.