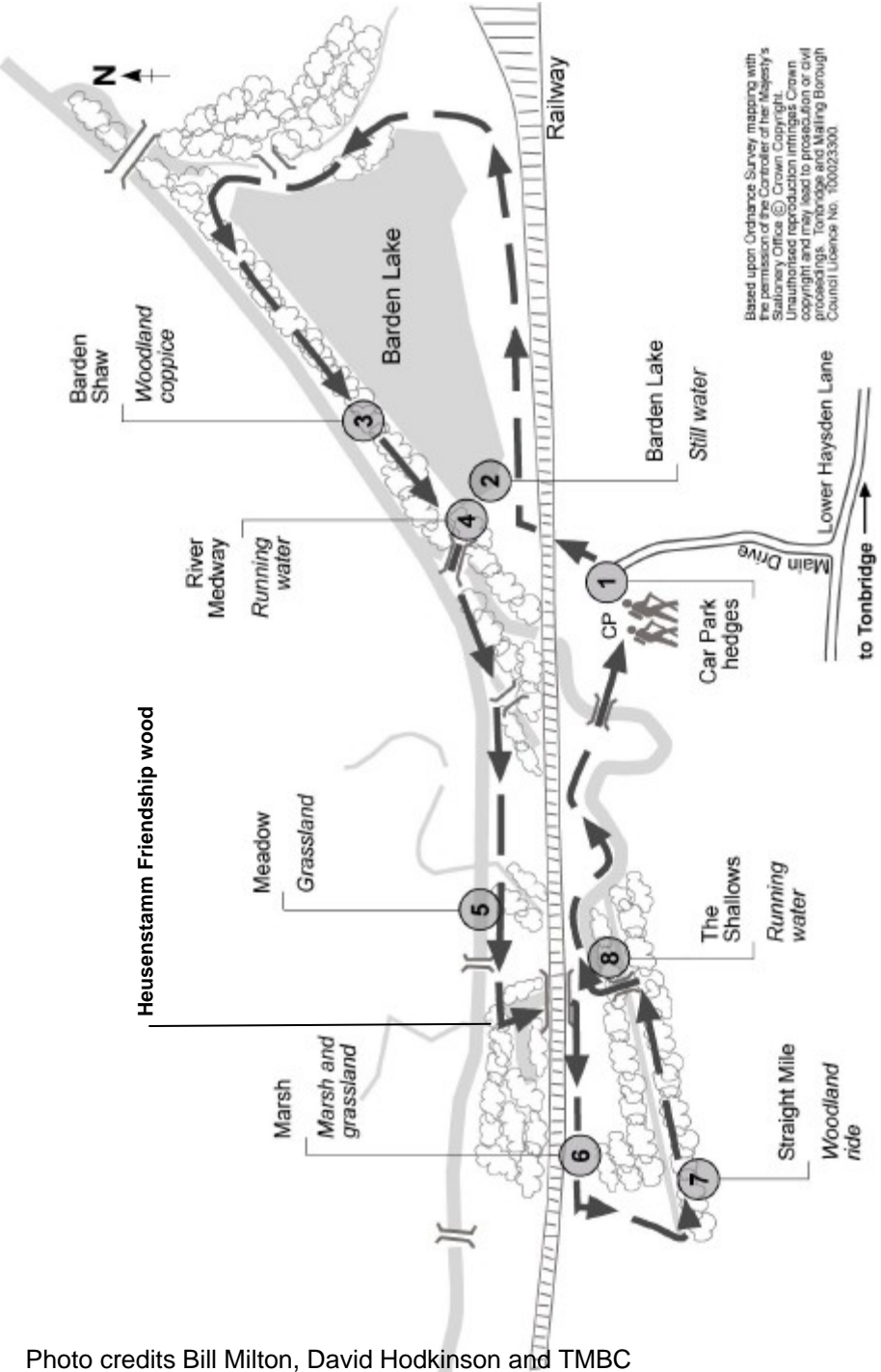


Children's Nature Trail Haysden Country Park



Explore the park searching for
wildlife and plants



www.tmbc.gov.uk

Photo credits Bill Milton, David Hodkinson and TMBC

This is a self guided trail around Haysden Country Park following the posts with **green numbers**.

The leaflet has questions (highlighted in italics) for adults to ask children. Children can also be encouraged to identify the wildlife from the pictures, ticking the boxes as they find them. Learn to tell the difference between a damselfly and dragonfly, and find out which plants and animals live in the park.

You may also like to use the table at the back of the leaflet to record other things you see.

As an alternative you could note down the National Grid References shown here for each point (these start with a TQ) and then using an Ordnance Survey map or smart phone compass app, to navigate to each point on site.

These symbols have been used throughout the leaflet:



Count



Listen



Find



Look



Things you might like to bring

- Identification field books or cards
- Binoculars or telescope for watching birds etc.
- Magnifying glass to look closely at plants or insects
- Notebook
- Pen or pencil

Hint: You may see more wildlife, if you walk quietly through the park.

Facts: Distance ½-2 miles 0.8-3.2 kilometers
 Time for easy walking 1-2½ hours
 Short cuts can be used to shorten the walk
 There are some unsurfaced paths

What else did you see today?

Date _____

Fill in the table below

Animal/Plant	Where	How many?

If you would like to tell us about your visit to the park, please contact Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council, Leisure Services, Gibson Building, Kings Hill, West Malling, Kent ME19 4LZ

email leisure.services@tmbc.gov.uk

We hope you enjoyed your visit to Haysden Country Park.

Please put your litter in a bin or take it home with you, other people do.

Further information on the world wide web

Birds www.rspb.org.uk

Butterflies www.butterfly-conservation.org

Dragonflies www.dragonflysoc.org.uk

Insects www.buglife.org.uk

Mammals www.mtuk.org

Kent Wildlife Trust www.kentwildlifetrust.org.uk

Identification charts - www.field-studies-council.org

This information is available in other formats please call Leisure Services on 01732 876172 or Email leisure.services@tmbc.gov.uk

stream. If you stand quietly in the woodland you might hear a bird called a whitethroat singing in the trees (the songs sound like â~tacc, taccâ and annoyed call â~tchur-rrrâ), or wren singing (the song sounds like loud ringing, warbling song; or a loud, rattling call).



LISTEN: *Stand still and listen for bird songs along the Straight Mile.*

Walk over the Straight Mile bridge and then over Rainbow bridge.

TQ56694597

Point 8 – The Shallows are part of the old River Medway, before it was diverted to the north into a new manmade channel and through the Leigh Flood Barrier. The Shallows now has less water, and was gradually becoming overgrown with water plants. This is a process known as ‘succession’; this is a natural process where plants compete to take over a clear space. The volunteers and Environment Agency have recently cleared some vegetation from part of The Shallows. The water plants that can be seen growing in the old river include yellow flag iris (bright yellow flowers), great reed mace (long brown sausage-like flowers), and common reed (large flowering brown seed-heads).



COUNT: *The mole hills in the grass, how many can you count? Write this number down here.*

Moles tunnel underground and leave small piles of soil on the surface.

The grass meadows along The Shallows, are also a good place to find more damselflies. They lay their eggs among the water plants in summer and live underwater as ‘nymphs’, which take up to 3 years to mature into the adults you can see flying in the Park. Can you tell the difference between a dragonfly and a damselfly? Damselflies can close their wings and sit still; dragonflies fly much faster and most cannot close their wings.

Return to the far end of the car park by crossing over The Shallows footbridge.

Introduction

Haysden Country Park is an area of countryside along the River Medway Valley outside Tonbridge in Kent. The Park contains a variety of habitats including: open water; grassland; and woodland, which attracts a variety of wildlife. The park is a Local Nature Reserve because it is a special place for wildlife.

If you would like to see a wide variety of wildflowers, and wildlife, or learn the difference between a dragonfly and a damselfly then follow the trail.

Follow the posts with **green numbers** and the map on the back of this leaflet. Much of the route is on unmade paths which will be muddy after wet weather. Unfortunately some parts of the route may be difficult for some users due to gates and narrow paths.

TQ57144596

Point 1 – From Point 1 at the main Information Board by the flag pole walk down the path following the hedgerow.



COUNT: *Spend a few minutes counting. How many different plants can you count in the hedgerow?*

This hedgerow was planted with a number of different species, but as a general rule the more species in a hedgerow the older the hedge.



FIND: *Which plants in the pictures can you find in the hedge? (in Summer)*



Elder



Bramble



Hawthorn

Now go under the Railway Bridge towards Barden Lake.

TQ57234609

Point 2 – Barden Lake

The banks of Barden Lake are heavily grazed by Canada and greylag geese. Canada and greylag geese are both introduced species to the United Kingdom, which have escaped into the wild and have now become common in the countryside. Unfortunately they eat large amounts of vegetation and this can lead to soil erosion. Many other birds live in and around the lake including waterfowl like mallard ducks, swans, great crested grebe, coots, and moorhens. Did you know that, bread can harm geese and ducks? Their natural diet is grass and plants.



LOOK: Can you find any of the water birds below?

Canada goose **Mallard duck** **Coot** **Swan**

Land birds like green woodpecker, swallow, and grey wagtail can also be seen in this area.

Hint: After Point 2, to shorten your walk, go left down the path and straight on to Point 3.

Walk around the lake to your right following the railway line. The two islands in the lake are nesting sites for waterfowl. Around the lake look for the wildflowers, daisies and dandelions, and birds-foot trefoil (tiny yellow flowers in the grass) and sedges that occur all year round. You might also see empty mussel shells.

TQ56374581

Point 7 – This is a woodland ride (the name in woodlands for an open path with vegetation on either side) and stream known as the Straight Mile which is a partly built canal. This is now a good area to search for plants, and insects.

The partial shade of the woodland ride with the canal running alongside is an ideal habitat to see a wide variety of insects such as butterflies, and damselflies. Ransoms or wild garlic (white flowers in spring) also flower along the banks of the canal. In summer comfrey (clusters of blue, bell shaped flowers), brambles and red campion and celendine can be seen along the edge of the path.



FIND: Can you find these plants ?



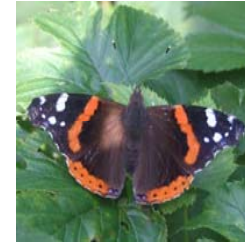
Comfrey **Ransoms** **Red campion** **Celendine**



FIND: Can you find these insects?



Damselfly



Butterfly



Spider

Along the stream you may occasionally see a kingfisher dart past, (a blue flash of colour), or in the evening a bat flying down the

woodland is very young (woodlands can be hundreds of years old) as it was planted after the Great Storm of 1987, but already supports a wide variety of birds and insects.

Rejoin the path and walk on past the woodland towards the railway line where you can see lichen and mosses growing on the damp brick walls. Follow the path through the railway arch and underneath the railway line.

Turn right after the railway arch following the path in the meadow towards the Leigh Flood Barrier grass embankment and the A21 flyover. In summer, in the meadow, look for the flowers of stichwort (tiny white flowers), clover (tightly bunched pink/purple flowers), buttercup (bright yellow flowers, (in spring wood anemones) and the many grasses.



LOOK: For insects feeding on the flowers.

FIND: Can you find these plants?




Buttercup □ **Stichwort** □ **Clover** □ **Anemone** □

TQ55444596

Point 6 – Go through the kissing gate at the end of the meadow. This is a marsh - the low lying ground has become waterlogged and now contains some typical marshland plants such as rushes and sedges.

From here you can take a short walk to the top of the grass flood barrier. From the top you can see Haysden Water lake and the boundary of the park. Walk back down to the marsh and follow the base of the flood barrier to Point 7.

 **LOOK:** Can you find the things below?



Mussel shell □ **Bird's foot trefoil** □ **Daisy** □ **Dandelion** □


TQ57284617

Point 3 – Barden Shaw is the name of the woodland behind Point 3. This woodland is a broad-leaved deciduous woodland (the trees lose their leaves in winter). In springtime look closely at the buds on ash and oak trees just before the leaves come out and you will see tiny flowers. In the wood you can find trees like oak, field maple, and ash and holly. You might see birds like blue tits, wren, and the mammal, grey squirrels. This is mature woodland that in the past has been managed in a traditional manner called 'coppicing'.


Coppicing means that groups of trees are cut back in rotation almost to the ground every few years. Cutting down the trees in this way lets light down to the woodland floor and the shrubs and ground plants can then grow. Coppiced trees re-grow from the base with several new shoots. Coppiced woodland is good for wildlife as it attracts many insects like butterflies and nesting birds.

The woodland is now being managed in a coppice rotation, with the large mature oak trees being left because oak has hundreds of insects and other wildlife living on them.



 **LOOK:** for trees that have been coppiced in the past

Coppiced tree □

 **LOOK:** Stand in the woodland for a few minutes, look for birds and animals living in the woodland



Blue tit ☐ **Pigeon** ☐ **Butterfly** ☐ **Squirrel** ☐

Return to the path along the lake, to Sharp's Bridge at Point 4.

TQ57174610

Point 4 – The River Medway.

The bridge over the River Medway is a good place to look for feeding insects such as damselflies and water birds. Stop and take a few minutes to look up and down the river. Look for birds like kingfishers and water plants such as yellow water lily.

 **LOOK:** Can you find any of the things shown below?



Dragonfly ☐



Kingfisher ☐



Water lily ☐

Hint: To shorten your walk (missing out points 5-8), walk on from this point until you reach the Stone Lock Bridge, go across this bridge and then under the railway line, then turn left crossing over the river at The Shallow Bridge, in a few minutes you will be back in the car park. This path is surfaced and the best option in the wet winter months.

TQ56714607

Point 4 to 5 – Meadows - as you walk between Points 4 and 5, you pass by the river channel on your right and grassland meadows to your left. Open grassland is a valuable habitat for wildlife. As summer approaches, insect activity builds up in the long grass. In summer the meadows contain many butterflies, beetles and flowering plants such as knapweed (purple flowers), speedwell (tiny blue flowers), teasel and thistles (purple flowers). A number of butterfly species can be found in the meadow over the summer such as meadow brown, red admiral and common blue – watch them feeding on the flowering plants. In Autumn teasels and thistles provide winter food for goldfinches. The bigger the number of wildflowers the better the meadow is for insects and other animals.



COUNT: Spend a few minutes looking at the meadow, count the number of different wildflowers, and write this number down.

 **LOOK:** For insects feeding on the flowers



FIND: Can you find any of the things shown below?



Goldfinch ☐ **Speedwell** ☐ **Knapweed** ☐ **Butterfly** ☐

As you continue your walk you will pass by a new woodland Heusenstamm Friendship Wood. If you have time take a short detour into the woodland around the circular path. This mixed