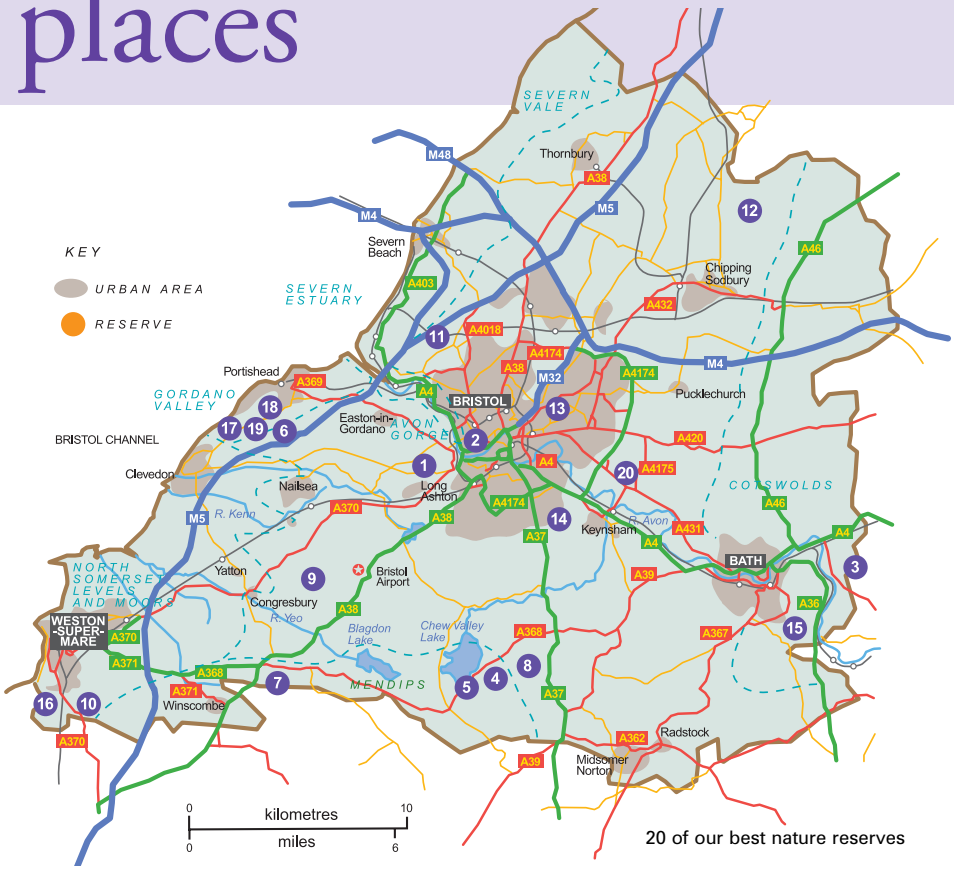
Avon Wildlife Trust our wild places

Below is a quick guide to twenty of our best sites together with some ideas of what you might see and how to get there.

More details can be found by logging on to our website, at www.avonwildlifetrust.org.uk. We are in the process of updating our access information for a new guide in 2005.



Ashton Court Meadow

Grid ref: 545 720

This reserve is a very special and wild part of the Ashton Court Estate, close to the centre of Bristol. Visit the reserve in May, and parts of the meadow will be full of green-winged orchids. In July, the main attraction is the butterflies. Clouds of marbled whites and meadow browns can be seen skimming over the grass. This is also a good site for the colourful day flying burnet moth.

How to get there: From A369 Bristol-Portishead road, after Leigh Woods turn left at traffic lights onto Beggar Bush Lane (B3129). Park after one km in lay-by (space for 5-6 cars), enter Ashton Court through gap in wall. Walk across golf course to meadow. Alternatively parking is available at the Clifton Lodge entrance of the Ashton Court Estate

Brandon Hill

Grid ref: 578 728

Discover an area devoted to wildlife in the heart of Bristol, where the wildflower meadow is at its best in midsummer, when ox-eye daisies, yellow rattle and knapweed add a fine splash of colour. A pond provides a breeding site for frogs, toads and smooth newts. Along the attractive woodland walk, birds such as jay, bullfinch and blackcap may be seen. Visit the Cabot Tower for a fine view of the city which lies in a valley carved by the River Avon.

How to get there: In the centre of Bristol, in the south-west corner of Brandon Hill Park overlooking Jacobs Wells Road.

Access: Access for wheelchairs from Great George Street and Berkeley Square only.

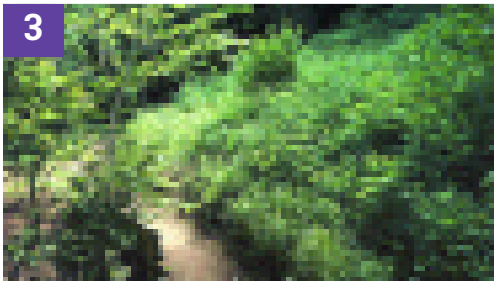
Brown's Folly

Grid ref:794 660

Standing high above the river Avon, with commanding views towards Bath, Brown's Folly boasts rich grasslands, woodlands and scrub carpeting the remains of the old Bath stone quarries. A delightful downland flora includes wild thyme, harebell and nine species of orchid – including the rare fly orchid. Pockets of ancient woodland on the lower slopes are home to woodpeckers, and unusual plants such as Bath asparagus.

How to get there: Take the minor road from Bathford to Kingsdown, taking a steep right-hand turn to Monkton Farleigh. Car park is near the brow of the hill on Prospect Place.

Access: Some paths are muddy in winter. Take extreme caution when approaching rock faces. Mines must not be entered.



Burledge Hill

Grid ref: 589 591

Burledge Hill forms part of a limestone plateau on the north-eastern fringes of the Mendip Hills overlooking Chew Valley Lake. Plant species found on the site include lady's mantle, saw-wort and devil's bit scabious. Birds such as willow warbler, garden warbler and whitethroat can be heard singing from the scrub areas.

How to get there: Burledge Hill is on the southern edge of the village of Bishop Sutton. Travelling south westwards on the A368, at Bishop Sutton turn left into Sutton Hill road. Park after c.1 miles in small lay-by on the left near the reserve entrance.

Access: There is a public footpath which crosses the reserve

Chew Valley Lake

Grid ref: 570 582

Chew Valley Lake is the largest artificial lake in the south west. It is extremely important for migrating and wintering wildfowl, warblers and swallows. Large numbers of reed warblers breed in the reedbeds.

How to get there: Take the B3114 south from Chew Stoke, bear left for West Harptree and head north-east on the A368. Good views across the reserve from causeway at Herriott's Bridge where there is car parking.

Access: Hides with permit only, obtainable from Bristol Water, Recreations Department, Woodford Lodge, on an annual or daily basis. Woodford Lodge is reached via the metalled track which heads towards the lake about half a mile south of Chew Stoke on the B3114.

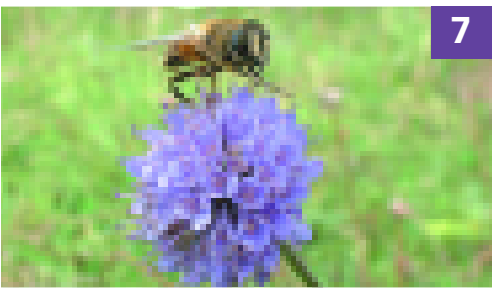
Clapton Moor

Grid ref: 458 735

Set within the Gordano Valley, Clapton Moor is an integral part of the levels and moors landscape and is important for breeding waders and wintering wildfowl. The network of rhynes are full of many rare plants such as frogbit, greater spearwort and fen pondweed along with nationally scarce invertebrates such as hairy dragonfly and ruddy darter.

How to get there: At Clapton-in-Gordano take Clapton Lane towards Clevedon. After two miles the entrance to the reserve is on the right-hand side opposite the entrance to New Farm. Clapton Lane has narrow bends and caution is advised. Parking is restricted. Please do not park and block any farm or field entrances.

Access: The birds are easily disturbed and the rhynes and wet grassland areas potentially treacherous. Access is therefore restricted to the path that leads to the hide, which gives excellent views over the moor.



Dolebury Warren

Grid ref: 455 590

The spectacular views across North Somerset and the Mendips made Dolebury Warren the natural choice for an imposing Iron-Age hill fort. Today wildflowers including small scabious, early purple orchid and eyebright carpet the grassy ramparts and hill slopes, attracting rare butterflies.

How to get there: Follow the A38 southwards from Churchill village. Take first left turn after traffic lights into Dolebury Bottom. Please drive slowly along lane and park in small car park. Follow footpaths to summit. (There is an alternative car park on north side of reserve.)

Access: Please keep dogs on leads. No suitable access for wheelchairs or pushchairs.

Folly Farm

Grid ref: 610 603

This unspoilt farm is a timeless piece of a vanished countryside. The meadows are of a type now rare in Britain, brimming with flowers such as betony and heath spotted orchid. Butterflies are abundant. Dowlings Wood is an old hazel coppice and amongst the many birds that can be seen are nuthatch, buzzard and great spotted woodpecker. The farm buildings date back to the 17th century, and will be restored during late 2005 to provide visitor facilities.

How to get there: Car parking at the centre of the farm. Travelling southwards from Bristol on the A37 travel through Pensford. At the large roundabout turn right onto the A368 towards Bishop Sutton. Travel for c.2 miles and look out for a wooden signpost to Folly Farm on your left before you reach Stowey.

Access: Open access to all parts of the farm, but please remember to close all the gates. No dogs allowed. Parking for disabled visitors next to the farmhouse. There is an Access for All trail through the woodland which is waymarked from the carpark.

Goblin Combe

Grid ref: 475 653

In this peaceful reserve, the airy grassland above contrast strongly with the shady Combe below. The grassland is best seen in late autumn, when it is dotted with flowers such as autumn gentian, autumn lady's tresses and yellow-wort. The site is superb for butterflies, with over 30 species recorded. The Combe itself is wooded and damp, and the home of the rare and unusual moonwort fern.

How to get there: From Cleeve on the A370 Bristol-Weston road, turn into Cleeve Hill Road. Park in the quarry on left side near Cleeve School. Follow the footpath through the Combe to reserve.

Access: Footpaths along floor of Combe can be very muddy and slippery. Take care, and do not approach cliffs and scree slopes.

Hellenge Hill

Grid ref: 345 572

The site commands extensive views across the Somerset Levels and the Bristol Channel and includes very rare areas of grassland found only on the southern scarp of the Mendips. Extensive gorse and hawthorn scrub provide good habitat for birds, invertebrates and adders (stout footwear is a sensible precaution).

How to get there: Take the A370 south from Weston-super-Mare and take the minor road on the left signposted to Bleadon, after about 1.5 km. Park sensibly in the village and walk along the minor road towards Loxton. Turn left up the track which is part of the Mendip Way.

Access: As well as the two public footpaths that cross the site there is open access to the grassland areas. The site is grazed by sheep and dogs are not allowed, except on leads along the public footpaths.

Lawrence Weston Moor

Grid ref: 544 791

This urban oasis is sandwiched between the M5 motorway and housing estates of Lawrence Weston. An extensive network of wet meadows and reedbeds, it is extremely rich in wildlife. The drier fields are hay meadows where plants such as meadowsweet and pepper saxifrage are common.The wetter meadows are important for birds such as reed buntings and snipe.

How to get there: From Long Cross in Lawrence Weston, turn into Lawrence Weston Road next to St Bede's School. Park just before the motorway bridge and take the track alongside the allotments. Buses to Long Cross.

Access: Fields are often very wet and there are no formal paths.

Lower Woods

Grid ref: 743 876

Lower Woods are the most extensive semi-natural woodland in the Avon area, with boundaries that have remained unchanged for several centuries. They have a rich woodland flora and excellent invertebrate, bird and mammal populations. Of particular note are the nightingales that occur at the northern edge of the woodland and can be heard singing from the end of April to mid May. The site is managed jointly with its owner, Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust.

How to get there: Lower Woods are about a mile east of Wickwar. Main vehicular access to parking at Lower Woods Lodge (ST746882), via a track off the Wickwar to Hawkesbury road. Vehicular access also at ST743862

Access: Public footpaths and bridleways cross the reserve.

Royate Hill

Grid ref: ST618748

This old railway embankment in Bristol range from limestone flora on the embankment top, to flower rich grassland, developing woodland and scrub on the embankment sides. Species such as the rare mouse eared chickweed and bee orchid have been recorded at the site.

How to get there: The entrance to the reserve is on Edward Street, next to Greenbank Cemetery in Eastville, Bristol. Royate Hill reserve is very close to the Bristol and Bath Cycle Path.

Access: Fairly steep steps lead up to an embankment footpath.

Stockwood Open Space

Grid ref: 625 693

This expanse of historic farmland on the edge of Bristol contains old meadows, thick hedges and woodlands and offers a panoramic view of south Bristol. Cowslip, dyer's greenweed and bird's-foot trefoil provide splashes of yellow here in autumn, and numerous butterflies include meadow brown, marbled white and large skipper. The ancient wood known as Ilsyngrove shelters bluebell, yellow archangel and the rare Bath asparagus. Two old farm ponds are homes for frogs, toads and newts.

How to get there: Between Stockwood and Brislington on the south-east fringe of Bristol. Parking at end of Stockwood Road, buses to Stockwood Road and The Coots.

Access: Tarmac paths provide access for wheelchairs. Cycleway crosses the reserve.

Tucking Mill

Grid ref: 764 615 / Area: 1.15 hectares

This small reserve is a very special example of traditional pasture, untouched by modern farming methods where a profusion of wildflowers grow, including germander speedwell and bee and pyramidal orchids. Butterflies abound in this undisturbed location. Listen for the noisy call or 'yaffle' of green woodpeckers. The valley itself has a fascinating history, with abandoned railway tracks, a coal canal and interesting geological features.

How to get there: Cars can be parked at Church Road, Combe Down and buses from Bath stop at the top of Ralph Allen Drive nearby.

Access: No paths, steep steps including two stiles.

Walborough

Grid ref: 316 579

This reserve has salt marsh and limestone grassland with rare plants which include Somerset hair-grass, green-winged and early purple orchid and autumn lady's tresses. Patches of sea-lavender add a splash of colour in late autumn. The Axe shelters good numbers of wildfowl and waders during autumn and winter, including redshank, dunlin, shelduck and black-tailed godwit.

How to get there: Follow signs to Uphill village from the southern end of Weston-super-Mare. Uphill leads towards the south end of Weston beach. Head towards the beach but park near the large sluice gates on the left or on Uphill Way in the lay-by. Walk past the boatyard either along the metalled track or along the sea wall to reach the reserve.

Access: A surfaced path allows access to parts of the site for those who are less mobile. There is open access to the grassland areas but please keep off the salt marsh to avoid disturbance to birds.

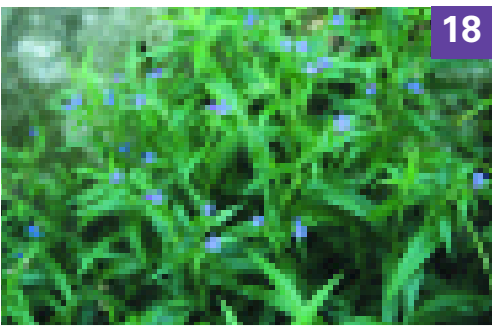
Walton Common

Grid ref: 428 738

There are excellent views of the Gordano Valley from the Common and of the Severn Estuary from from above the quarry. Butterflies are particularly notable including common blue, green and purple hairstreak, and dark green fritillary. Other insects such as grasshoppers, glow-worms and moths are abundant. The scrub and woodland edge provide food and nest-sites for blackcap and whitethroat. Buzzard, kestrel and sparrowhawk sometimes hunt across the common.

How to get there: Take B3124 between Clevedon and Portishead. In the village of Walton-in-Gordano, turn up the Portishead coast road. Park on roadside verge beside Clevedon golf course. Walk 25m towards village and up sign-posted diagonal public footpath on your left. Take care crossing the road.

Access: From several points on public footpaths.



Weston Big Wood

Grid ref: 456 750

Weston Big Wood is one of Avon's largest ancient woodlands. In springtime, the ground is covered with wood anemones, violets and masses of bluebells. The presence of other plants such as herb paris and yellow archangel together with the rare purple gromwell, show that this is an ancient woodland, dating back to the time when trees began to recolonise after the last Ice Age. The wood is very good for birds, including woodpecker, nuthatch, and tawny owl. Bats also roost in the trees, and the presence of many setts indicates a large badger population.

How to get there: From B3124 Clevedon-Portishead road, turn into Valley Road. Park in the lay-by approx 300 yards on right, and walk up the hill. Steps lead into the wood from the road..

Access: Paths can be muddy, slippery and steep-sided. Keep well away from the quarry sides.

Weston Moor

Grid ref: 443 739

Set in the heart of the Gordano Valley, Weston Moor is a large and expansive area of open moor, networked with species-rich rhynes, wet pasture and hay meadows. The reserve is full of many rare plants such as cotton grass, marsh pennywort and lesser butterfly orchid, along with nationally scarce invertebrates such as the hairy dragonfly and ruddy darter. During the spring and autumn the fields attract breeding lapwing, redshank and snipe. Other birds such as little owl, linnet, reed bunting and skylark also breed in the area. Sparrowhawk, buzzard and green woodpecker are regularly recorded over the reserve.

How to get there: Access by car is currently difficult as parking is restricted. Bus services to the Gordano Valley from major centres. Please contact the Trust office for up to date information.

Access: The birds are easily disturbed and the rhynes and wet grassland areas potentially treacherous. A limited number of annual permits for the moorland area are available. Open access is restricted to the fields north of Walton Brook, which give excellent views over the moor.

Willsbridge Valley

Grid ref: 665 708

Willsbridge Valley is a wildlife haven on the edge of Bristol which survives amongst modern housing estates, a peaceful wooded valley which is the home of the Trust's Education and Countryside Centre. The woodlands are at their best in spring, full of bluebells, campions and the sounds of birdsong. The ponds are home to frogs, toads and dragonflies, and dippers and kingfishers may be seen on the stream. Noctule and greater horseshoe bats feed on the many insects in the valley. You can learn about the history of the valley by following the heritage sculpture trail. The wild waste garden is an inspiration, with excellent examples of how you can make your garden a better home for wildlife.

How to get there: Take the A431 Bristol to Bath road, turning into Long Beach Road. Car park on left. Buses from Bristol to Long Beach Road or Willsbridge Hill.

Access: Wheelchair access via Willsbridge Hill to most of valley.

We encourage visitors to use environmentally friendly forms of transport wherever possible. Most of our reserves are easily accessible by bicycle. Further details can be found on the Trust website www.avonwildifetrust.org.uk, where there are links to Sustrans national cycle map.

Registered Charity No. 280422