



Portbury Wharf

Portbury Wharf is our newest nature reserve, and makes a marvellous birthday present for our 30th anniversary year.

The land between Portishead and Royal Portbury Dock is extremely important for wildlife. It lies adjacent to the Severn Estuary which provides rich feeding grounds for thousands of birds, and contains a variety of habitats close to the estuary foreshore, including two large pools, several ponds, rhynes (drainage channels), grazing marsh, hay meadows and hedgerows. Planning consent for the Port Marine housing development here was only granted by North Somerset Council on condition that the developers designated a nature reserve on the land adjoining the new development. The ongoing costs of managing and maintaining the reserve will be met by the residents through an annual charge, and the reserve will be managed by Avon Wildlife Trust.

What makes Portbury Wharf special?

The large pools close to the foreshore of the estuary and the other areas of open water in the reserve provide an invaluable wetland habitat for rare species such as great crested newt, water vole and otter. Invertebrates like the hairy dragonfly can be seen here and greater horseshoe bat can be found hunting for insects in this area. Grazing marsh is the name given to wet grassland criss-crossed by rhynes and is particularly important for many species of wetland birds including snipe and lapwing. The three secluded hay meadows and hedgerows will benefit from improved management, resulting in an increase in insect life and



hairy dragonfly



dunlins in flight

providing food and shelter for many small mammals, which in turn provide a meal for birds of prey including buzzards and owls.

The reserve is close to another key area for wildlife – the Gordano Valley, where the Trust has several further Nature reserves. The open land between Portishead and Royal Portbury Dock provides a green link between the Severn Estuary and the Gordano Valley, allowing wildlife to move between the two. Within the reserve there are good views from the higher ground over the reserve to the Welsh Hills and Severn Estuary.



dunlin



barn owl

What wildlife will I see?

Wading birds and wildfowl will be the easiest wildlife to spot from the reserve, but you'll see other birds such as skylark and barn owls. In the early evening you'll spot bats hunting for insects over the reserve. You may be lucky enough to spot an otter. Other wildlife include:

■ **Curlew** – large wading birds, with long legs and a long down-curving bill, which they use to extract lugworms and ragworms from intertidal mudflats.



curlew

■ **Dunlin** – the most abundant of the estuary's birds. At high tide they often gather in flocks of several hundred, which wheel and turn in breathtaking displays.

■ **Redshank** – groups of redshank gather on small tidal creeks, and are restless birds, often the first to take flight when approached. They are predominantly brown, paler below, and the red legs that give them their name are very marked.

■ **Shelduck** – the large size and predominantly white plumage of Shelduck, with a green head, chestnut breast and red bill make them both unmistakable and highly visible. They nest in rabbit burrows and tree holes some way inland and lead their brood to the estuary.



shelduck

■ **Barn owl** – although owls are nocturnal creatures barn owls do fly in daylight – best seen in late afternoon. Their creamy white plumage gives a ghostly effect as they fly low over the salt marsh and meadows, hunting for small mammals like field voles.

■ **Brown hare** – look out for boxing hares in March – female hares turning down the advances of amorous males! These animals scamper through the open fields, their black ear tips and longer legs making them quite distinct from rabbits.



brown hare

■ **Water vole** – our most threatened mammal today, and elusive to spot, although they do inhabit the rhynes and pools of the reserve. They're a dark, rich brown, and are active during daylight and particularly in the early morning and evening.

Find out more

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a timeless landscape

Future plans...

In June 2010 Bernie D'Arcy was appointed as Reserve Warden and Neil Hutton as Community Officer. They're both looking forward to working with local people at Portbury Wharf, and are developing a programme of events and activities.



oystercatcher

The reserve also has two small buildings, which are currently derelict; in time we hope to turn them into a Visitor Centre.

"My favourite time is early in the morning, with skylarks singing over the salt marsh and the call of the curlew like a sound from the remote past ... walking in early summer near one of the rhynes you see swallows freshly arrived from Africa, dipping and swooping, and big chunky hairy dragonflies patrolling up and down. Last spring we were thrilled to see oystercatchers nesting in the lagoon, and to catch sight of two new hatched birds running down the slope. It's a very beautiful, almost timeless landscape, with the distant view of the Welsh hills, and the glimpse of the second Severn bridge linking us to the present."

Mary Wood, the Trust's Senior Ecologist

