

IMPORTANT ADVICE

- **Please use the Reserve responsibly in accordance with the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.**
- **Please keep to the path which follows a circular route around the loch.**
- **Dogs can disturb wildlife at all times of the year; therefore they must be kept on a lead at all times.**
- **Seasonal grazing maintains biodiversity in meadows bordering the loch. To avoid danger, please keep to the fenced path and do not cross the unfenced gaps near cattle. Three gaps are crossed between kissing gates and two between self-closing gates.**
- **Please clean up after your dog and take litter home with you. There is a bin at the viewpoint.**



Charity registration no. SC005792

Balgavies Loch Guide to the Walking Circuit (Summer Edition)



Welcome to the Balgavies Loch Wildlife Reserve. Numbers refer to the posts placed at intervals round the circuit. These are numbered clockwise starting at the car park at the hide. The leaflet also describes features that should be visible when you look around the posts.

Drawings by kind permission of Caroline Anstice

23. The ground here forms a very obvious ridge called an esker. About 10,000 years ago, toward the end of the last glaciation, the sands and gravel beneath your feet were deposited by water rushing through a tunnel under a thick sheet of ice. The hollow north of the path marks a borrow-pit from which road-building material was probably extracted during the 19th Century.

25. Here, on the zig-zag descent, is the best place from which to view the west end of the Reserve. The low ground separating Balgavies and Rescobie lochs was made first by peat-forming vegetation, then colonizing 'fen carr' woodland, dividing what was once a single loch into two.

27. Tree species of low stature were planted here to shelter the new wood from the prevailing westerlies. Cherry plum, planted in mistake for blackthorn, flowers into late March.

29. Here the loch is screened from the meadows by a strip of 'fen carr' woodland, mainly of willows. These are adapted to the damp conditions and survive successfully, even though their roots are waterlogged each winter. The slope south of the path alternates between dry grassland and some wet seeps with tufts of dark green rushes. The elegantly palmately lobed pleated leaves of lady's mantle can be seen with meadow sweet and northern marsh orchid (with dark red flowers). There are occasional hawthorn bushes, which would spread across the drier parts without regular grazing.

31. The dry, hollow area south of the path may be an old quarry. Rabbit holes reveal the nature of what lies beneath; sand and gravel deposited by glacial melt water about 10,000 years ago. The gean copse is a magnificent sight in full April blossom.

Summering Birds

The importance of safeguarding the Reserve as a secure breeding site for a wide range of birds is shown by the fact that no less than 56 species have bred in recent years. These include residents (eg grey heron, treecreeper, great spotted woodpecker) and summer migrants (eg white-throat, spotted flycatcher). Starting in April, several species can be heard as they join residents in proclaiming their territories. Later, mallard and tufted duck can be seen marshalling their sometimes quite large families. Moorhens 'lily-trot' when yellow water-lilies cover the western shallows: buzzards frequently 'mew' overhead; reed buntings repeat their dotted trill (from the reeds, as one would expect). In the summer months summer-migrant swallows, sand martins, house martins and swifts make a marvelous sight as they hawk for insects over the loch in the evening.



Numbered Posts

1. The Wielstaves Lane runs northwards to cross the ditch by which the western end of the Reserve drains into the loch. The device on the jetty monitors the water level which changes markedly with the seasons. Conservation of the wetland vegetation depends on a high winter water level. On the drier rising ground east of the lane there is a mixed woodland of Scots pine, beech and oak. Red squirrels can be seen here, their presence betrayed by the chewed cones from which the lower scales have been removed. The lane leads on to Wielstaves Cottage, home of the Reserve Warden.

3. The path now skirts the cottage garden. Here the trees are mainly ash, with some self-sown sycamores. There is a hollow, damp in the winter, that is the backwater of the loch; and ahead lies the railway trackbed on an embankment, constructed to keep the surface dry.



5. This is the trackbed of the former railway line through Strathmore from Perth to Aberdeen, closed during the 1960s. After four decades without trains, the trackbed has been transformed by self-sown trees, mainly birch and alder. To make the walkway some of these have been removed and a path of quarry chips was laid in 2006 over the coarse railway ballast. At this point the embankment is joined from the north-west by the Lunan Water that drains Rescobie Loch. Yellow marsh marigold flowers in May.

7. Here the Lunan passes beneath the embankment to enter the loch. Its original course was blocked by the embankment near point 5. Clockwise walkers will notice that the view to the south has begun to open up, with Scots pines on the island to the left which are the favoured roost of fish-eating ospreys and cormorants. Herons are sometimes visible on the peninsula across the bay. Occasionally a kingfisher may be glimpsed as a quickly moving blue flash. The shorter, lighter-coloured reed canary grass replaces common reed in the shallows.

9. This point gives the best view southward over the loch. The embankment has been colonized by ash, oak, birch and willow, with a dense carpet of evergreen ivy. Kidney vetch (food plant of the small blue butterfly) once thrived on the open ballast. The butterfly has disappeared as vigorous herbage displaced the vetch. Mute swans often nest in the reeds.

11. The bridge carries a path from Mains of Balgavies. Formerly it carried a tail-race from the farm mill; the wooden trough attached to the west face of the bridge has now been replaced by a metal chute in 2011. The cutting provides shelter and shade for moisture-dependent plants such as mosses and ferns.

13. Notice the platforms and ticket-office of the former Aldbar Road passenger station. Peering over the stone dyke on the south side one has a good view of the reed beds near the tunnel to the left through which the Lunan leaves the loch and a general view south-westwards across the loch. Here, in the evening, fortunate observers sometimes see otters swimming near the reeds, perhaps also Daubenton's bats, hawking for insects over the water.

17. The low-lying area at the east end of the loch has soil that is sandy and damp for much of the year with some flooding in winter. Good stands of yellow flag iris (May/



June) and meadow sweet (July) harbour numerous common blue damselflies.

19. The ground beneath the slope behind consists mainly of sand and gravel. This is somewhat unstable and readily moves down the slope when loosened by freezing and thawing of water in the soil. Grazing livestock cause the creeping soil to form miniature terraces on the hillside. White windflower and yellow celandine cover this area in April. Three plants with small flowers are abundant later; heath bedstraw (white), germander speedwell (blue) and tormentil (yellow) Water plants are arranged in three depth zones; yellow iris and dark red marsh cinquefoil in the drier parts, reeds further out, and beyond them bluish-green patches of common club-rush. As you approach point 21, the yellow flowers of tufted loosestrife and the pink of water bistort may be seen in the shallows in late June.

21. The broadleaved trees in the wood were planted in the mid 1980s when mature conifers (Corsican pine and larch) were felled. Ash, beech, elm, oak and hazel were planted and some old broadleaved trees remain. The path goes uphill, levels out, then crosses the **viewpoint** car park; paired gates on both sides of the viewpoint allow cattle to pass through.