



Access

The rotting wood found throughout the reserve is important for the many types of bracket fungi and mosses which rely on the dead wood for nutrients.

Conservation and management

Such an interesting and natural area so close to town provides an exceptional opportunity for educational use, especially given that the local secondary school is only a field away.

A nature trail has been provided, with a duckboard walkway which both protects the fragile vegetation and keeps visitors dry. With the ground being so wet the boards soon rot and have to be renewed frequently.



Further details

For more information about this or the other Scottish Wildlife Trust reserves, contact:

The Scottish Wildlife Trust
 25 Johnstone Terrace, CLOMEND, KIRK CLOMEND,
 Edinburgh EH14 4UN.
 Tel 031-226 4602 0131 - 312 - 7765

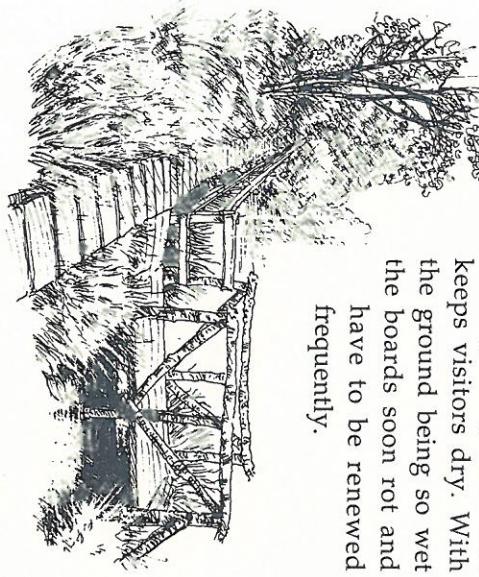


Wildlife Reserve Guide



More recently, a pond has been dug out to create a habitat of open water and a hide has been built overlooking it. For a small deposit, keys for the hide can be obtained from the Tourist Office on the Whitesands.

Fountainbleau and Ladypark



The Reserve

This five-hectare reserve of low-lying marshy birchwood was established by the Scottish Wildlife Trust in 1967, and from the beginning the aim was not only to protect a precious wetland habitat, but also to acquire an area which could be developed for educational purposes.

Set within walking distance of the bustling congestion of Dumfries, the Ladypark and Fountainbleau reserve is a secluded and tranquil wildlife haven which is surely unique in its proximity to a major city. An early morning visit could well reveal a heron probing in search of frogs.

Sit quietly and you may spot a roe deer, feeding on the outskirts of the reserve before retreating deeper into the shelter of the wood as the day moves on.

History

The area has not always had such a peaceful atmosphere. A loch occupied the site in late medieval times and it was to the shores of the Black Loch that cholera sufferers were banished, where they lived in brushwood shelters until they died or recovered. Hangings took place near the loch site up to the 1700's.

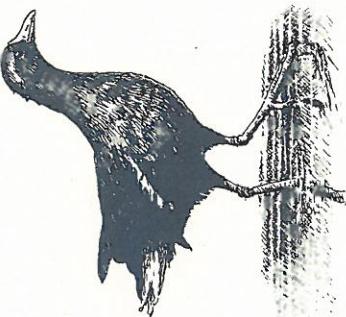
Apparently the frozen surface of the loch also proved a favourite place for the town's curlers.

Formation

Since then, many changes have taken place in the environment, for ecosystems are living systems which alter with time. Over the centuries, the steady accumulation of mud and plant remains slowly filled the natural depression of the ancient loch and what was formerly open water became marshland.

There, colonising plants in their turn added to the humus until conditions were suitable for invasion by trees such as willow and alder which can tolerate wet conditions.

Today these species still occur in the wetter areas, but birch now dominates the woodland cover. But it is not a typical wood. Here water dominates the senses—stray off the path and the ground is treacherously boggy and deep water-filled drains criss-cross the area.



Moorhen

Wildlife

Coming off the surrounding farmland into the reserve, the path draws you under the canopy of the birch trees into a rich and moist oasis. In summer time, damselflies dart among the rushes—vivid blue against green—while in winter, colour can still be found in the lingering gold of the autumn leaves.

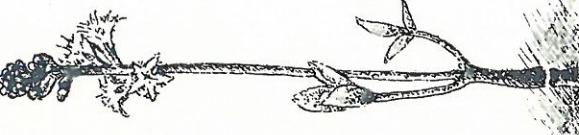
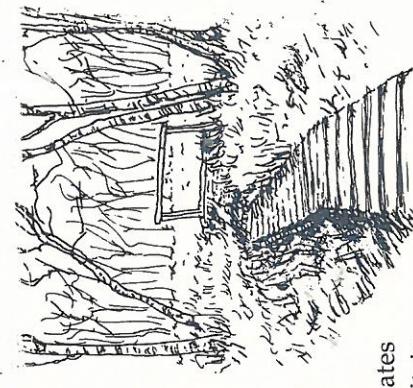
In the swampy areas, bottle sedge and white sedge are the main ground plants,

amongst which there are patches of lilac-coloured marsh violet, marsh cinquefoil, the small creeping marsh pennywort and bogbean. The latter is often found growing within the water and has pink and white flowers set on a spike. Its name comes from the similarity of its young leaves to those of the broad bean.

In drier areas, different plants grow up, the more common ones being purple-moor grass and common hair grass. At the southern end of the reserve, the birchwood is replaced by wet meadows of tufted hair-grass and meadow-sweet, home in the summer for ringlet butterflies.

The mixture of wetland and woodland habitats provides homes for a wide variety of invertebrate life which in turn supports a rich bird population. The many decaying tree trunks are vital for the willow tit which needs sufficiently soft wood to excavate her nest hole.

Willow warblers are particularly abundant, flying in from Africa for the summer, while other breeding birds include reed buntings, sedge warblers and a pair of kestrels which occupy a nest box erected for their benefit. The shady sides of the ditches, overhung with alders and lined with dense strands of bur-reed and soft rush, provide sheltered roost and nest sites for mallard and moorhen.



Bogbean