



COUNTRYSIDE GUIDE



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Welcome to Huntingdonshire's Countryside Guide

Huntingdonshire has a fantastic range of wildlife sites, many of which are National Nature Reserves. We hope that this booklet will inspire you to visit some of them, and to explore the beautiful countryside surrounding the small market towns and villages of this ancient county.

Huntingdonshire lies about 80km north of London, where EW and NS routes intersect, bringing millions of people past our doorstep. Increasing numbers choose to stop and have a look around at the special wildlife and places we have to offer, particularly along the corridor of the River Great Ouse. The scenery remains largely unspoilt and there is good access for outdoor recreation, including birdwatching or walking. It is worth noting that beyond the immediate district, the Brecks, the Norfolk and Suffolk coasts, Rutland Water and Rockingham Forest are all within easy reach, so Huntingdonshire is a great place to stop.



The River Great Ouse runs for 41km through Huntingdonshire, connecting the historic market towns of Huntingdon, St Ives and St Neots. Much of the river valley has been dug for gravel, leaving large areas of lakes. These have developed into fantastic wetland areas such as Paxton Pits Nature Reserve and the Hanson-RSPB Wetland Project at Needingworth. The area is also well known for its extensive wet meadows, some of which are still botanically very rich.

The two oldest nature reserves in Britain were created by the Rothschild family at Woodwalton Fen and Wicken Fen, but perhaps of most interest to conservationists is the large area that is currently involved in the creation of new wetlands. The Great Fen Project aims to restore 3,700 hectares of lost fenland between Woodwalton Fen and Holme Fen. It is one of the most exciting habitat restoration projects ever undertaken in Britain.

If you are interested in birdwatching, our wetlands are the main bird habitat. These include the Cambridgeshire Fens, the Great Ouse valley, and Grafham Water. The Ouse and Nene Washes are also on our doorstep.

Alongside our wetlands we have important areas of wet grassland and wet woodland as well as agricultural land with its own important wildlife.



We have several good woodland sites to visit for those interested in birds. Of course there are no mountains and no coast in Huntingdonshire, so it may come as a surprise that, if you come at the right time, we can show you dotterels on passage, breeding avocets and black tailed godwits.

On a good day in May you might see over 130 species of birds in Huntingdonshire, while in winter you might see over 80. The total bird list in the district is about 240 species.

We expect the wetland birds that are already in Huntingdonshire, such as bittern, egret, water rail, marsh harrier, cetti's warbler and bearded tit to increase over the next decade because we are creating habitat especially for them. Red kites breed here already and ospreys are likely to move in soon.

Farmland birds such as tree sparrows and corn buntings may also increase because of our increased efforts on their behalf, but with the changing climate it is difficult to predict what new species will move in. Candidates include ravens, corncrakes and cranes.

Huntingdonshire offers a wealth of heritage attractions. It is the birthplace of Oliver Cromwell, and was also home to Samuel Pepys. To fully appreciate all the district has to offer, you may want to stay at one of our quality assured hotels, guesthouses or campsites. Please contact 01480 388588 to request a copy our new Visitor Guide.

Key to Symbols

	Wheelchair access		Interesting invertebrates
	Waterproof footwear advisable		Car parking
	Information centre		Toilets
	No dogs		Refreshments
	Of special interest to birdwatchers		Picnic area
	Interesting plants		Site of Special Scientific Interest
	National Nature Reserve		

If you require a large print version of this information please telephone 01480 388588

www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk



Brampton Wood is the second largest wood in Cambridgeshire, and supports a remarkable variety of plants and animals. It consists primarily of ash and field maple with hazel coppice, but there are extensive blackthorn thickets, stands of recently planted conifers and many other trees and shrubs. Over 300 plant species have been recorded here; the wood is notable for abundant primroses, its wild pears and the botanical diversity of the fine wide rides. It is particularly well known for butterflies, including white admiral, purple hairstreak and black hairstreak. There have been 39 species of butterfly recorded in the wood, although some have not been seen for many years. Brampton Wood is also noted for birds, with at least 40 breeding species including sparrowhawk, tawny owl, blackcap, garden warbler and woodcock. Dormice were released into the wood in 1992 and are continuing to expand their territories. The Wildlife Trust purchased this Site of Special Scientific Interest in 1992.



LOCATION: The wood is on the north side of the road between Brampton and Grafham, about 1.6km west of the A1 and 3.2km east of Grafham village. If travelling on the A1, take the exit to Brampton. On reaching the village green, follow the road past the pub and continue over the A1 bridge towards Grafham. Brampton Wood is on the right hand side.

OS MAP REFERENCE: Sheet 153; TL 185 698

OUR MAP REFERENCE: C3 (see pages 26/27)

SIZE: 132 hectares

CONTACT: Managed by The Wildlife Trust, The Manor House, Broad St, Great Cambourne, Cambridge, CB23 6DH

Tel: 01954 713500

Website: www.wildlifebcnp.org

www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk



Monks Wood National Nature Reserve is a remnant of the 'wildwood', which covered much of Britain around 5000 years ago.

The dominant trees are oak, ash, elm, aspen and field maple. The reserve is also notable for its large number of wild service trees. A wide range of shrub species occur, including hazel, hawthorn, guelder rose, wayfaring tree, spindle, dogwood and wild privet. There are extensive stands of blackthorn, which still support colonies of the rare black hairstreak butterfly.

White-letter hairstreak and white admiral are amongst the other interesting butterflies to be found. Even more impressive, is the variety of beetles; over 1000 species have now been recorded, making Monks Wood one of the top sites in the country for this group. More unusual plants such as greater butterfly orchid, violet helleborine and crested cow-wheat are also present.

One of the biggest changes to affect the wood over the last 20 years has been the great increase in the number of deer. Parts of the woods are still coppiced, creating a series of green, sunny clearings used by many different plants, birds and insects.



LOCATION: Situated off the B1090. 1km west of Woodwalton, near Huntingdon. 3km north of the A1/A14 junction. No car parking, although there is a lay-by on the B1090, 300 metres from the reserve. No disabled access to the site.

OS MAP REFERENCE: TL 198 792

OUR MAP REFERENCE: C3 (see pages 26/27)

SIZE: 157 hectares

CONTACT: Managed by Natural England, Northminster House, Northminster Road, Peterborough, PE1 1UA

Tel: 01733 455103

Website: www.naturalengland.org.uk

www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk



Waresley and Gransden Woods are two adjoining oak/ash woods, which have been part of the local landscape for thousands of years. For centuries it was managed as coppice with standards, and is mentioned as coppice habitat in the Domesday Book. This management created the conditions in which woodland flowers thrive. Although the woods have year-round appeal, they are at their most spectacular in spring when the woodland floor becomes carpeted with wild flowers including primroses, oxslips, violets and the scented bluebells. The woods are home to good numbers of breeding birds, and in summer the rides and glades are filled with wild flowers and insects that feed on their nectar, including butterflies, such as the comma. The paths and rides are mown for the benefit of wild flowers and visitors. Coppicing has been re-introduced to allow the ground flora to flourish. The woods are managed as a Site of Special Scientific Interest by The Wildlife Trust.



LOCATION: From St Neots take the B1046 towards Great Gransden. At the edge of the village take the small road on the right running southwest towards Waresley. About two thirds of a kilometre down this road, there is a small bridge (Waresley Dean Bridge) over a stream; park on the grass verge by the bridge and walk up the concrete track to the sewage works. Follow the fence to the right, up to the wood.

OS MAP REFERENCE: Sheet 153; TL 263 548

OUR MAP REFERENCE: C5 (see pages 26/27)

SIZE: 54 hectares

CONTACT: Managed by The Wildlife Trust, The Manor House, Broad St, Great Cambourne, Cambridge, CB23 6DH

Tel: 01954 713500

Website: www.wildlifebcnp.org

www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk



Holme Fen National Nature Reserve boasts the lowest point in Britain. In 1852, a cast-iron post was erected by Charles Wells, at the edge of Holme Lode covert. Fixed to timber piles driven into the underlying clay, the post was set with its top at ground level. Over the years, the peat has dried out and wasted away due to increased drainage, so that the ground level today has shrunk nearly 4 metres below the top of the post. The Holme Fen silver birch woodland is considered to be the finest of its type in lowland Britain. Although some trees were planted in the 19th century, most are self-seeded and form woodland blocks of varying ages. The woodland and scrub provide rich habitat for many of the 450 species of fungi, which have been found on the reserve, and offer shelter and food for insects and birds. In winter, siskins and redpolls feed on the alder seeds, while in summer, nightingales, blackcaps and woodpeckers nest among the foliage. There are species here that have not been recorded anywhere else in the UK. The Great Fen Project aims to link this National Nature Reserve with Woodwalton Fen (see page 42 for more information).



LOCATION: Holme Fen is between the villages of Holme and Ramsey St Mary's, off the B660 road. Very limited parking available in laybys. Not suitable for coaches.

OS MAP REFERENCE: Sheet 142; TL 205 890

OUR MAP REFERENCE: C2 (see pages 26/27)

SIZE: 266 hectares

CONTACT: Managed by Natural England, Northminster House, Northminster Road, Peterborough, PE1 1UA

Tel: 01733 455103

Website: www.naturalengland.org.uk
www.greatfen.org.uk

www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk



Houghton Meadow is in a beautiful location on the edge of the village of Houghton, with its working mill, set on the banks of the River Great Ouse. The reserve protects four old meadows; the ridge and furrow on the surface of three were left by mediaeval ploughs. Since that time they have been untouched, and are now carpeted with neutral grassland, which includes plants like green-winged orchid, yellow rattle, salad burnet and pepper saxifrage. The fourth, Browns Meadow, is an old flood meadow, which provides good grazing after winter flooding each year. This meadow is not part of the Site of Special Scientific Interest. The hedges, which edge the fields, are growing on ridges in the ridge and furrow, and pre-date the Parliamentary Enclosure Award. These are relatively old hedges for this area, and contain 18 species of tree and shrub including hazel, which is rare in hedges in eastern England. The strip of long grass and tall herbs growing between the meadow and hedge is an important habitat for small mammals from both the hedge and grassland. The meadows are maintained by traditional methods; Browns Meadow is grazed during the summer and the other three are allowed to flower and set seed before a hay cut in mid-July.



LOCATION: The meadow is west of Houghton village, just off the A1123 (Huntingdon – St Ives). Please park in Houghton Market Square and walk along Thicket Road to the reserve. Stiles allow access to all four fields.

OS MAP REFERENCE: Sheet 153; TL 293 717

OUR MAP REFERENCE: D3 (see pages 26/27)

SIZE: 8 hectares

CONTACT: Managed by The Wildlife Trust, The Manor House, Broad Street, Great Cambourne, Cambridge, CB23 6DH

Tel: 01954 713500

Website: www.wildlifebcnp.org

www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk



Portholme is the largest lowland meadow in England, and is almost completely surrounded by water. It is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest.

The site is owned by The London Anglers Association, who are advised on the management of the site by Natural England. Traditional farming methods are used on the large area of grazing land, which provides a source of hay for the farming community. Many species of insects, grasses and wild flowers thrive on the site, including the rare snakeshead fritillary. This vast area of land is a natural reservoir, holding excess water in times of flood, and was once the site of the Racecourse. In 1760, racing at Portholme was one of the nation's most fashionable events of the year. Today, visitors can walk around the site on the extensive footpaths which lead off the three main entrances. The footpaths form a triangle across the meadow, and each footpath is approximately 1.6km in length. Large flocks of waders use this site in winter.



LOCATION: The meadow is near Godmanchester. The three entrances are via Mill Lane in Huntingdon, opposite the bus station, Bromholme Lane, near Brampton, opposite the campsite, and Riverside Park in Godmanchester, where you go over the Chinese Bridge and follow the Ouse Valley Way signs.

OS MAP REFERENCE: Sheet 153; TL 236 705

OUR MAP REFERENCE: C4 (see pages 26/27)

SIZE: 104 hectares

CONTACT: Countryside Services, Huntingdonshire District Council, Hinchingsbrooke Country Park, Brampton Road, Huntingdon, Cambs, PE29 6DB.

Tel: 01480 451568

Email: hinchingsbrookecountrypark@huntsdc.gov.uk

www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk



St Neots Common is classed as true common land, which is used communally by the commoners of the parish.

The commons were often heaths on poor soil or, as in St. Neots, meadows which were too wet for ploughing. Commoners were allowed to own livestock, which could be grazed on the commons. St Neots Common is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and is one of the few alluvial grasslands (growing on silt deposited by the river), which has remained under a traditional grazing regime. This created and maintains a species rich sward, which varies from permanently dry areas, to others which are flooded for several months each year. The ponds and ditches support a thriving community of aquatic plants, and are home to many insects, frogs and toads. Nine different species of willow grow in the holt. It is also one of the best sites to see the southern marsh orchid and marsh orchid. You may also find water violet and tubular water dropwort as well as more common species such as purple loosestrife and yellow water lily. Otters are known to use this stretch of the river.



LOCATION: The Common is on the edge of St Neots. From the town centre take the road to Little Paxton; the Common is on the left-hand side of the road and parking is available in St Neots town centre. A number of public footpaths cross the meadow. The Ouse Valley Way footpath follows the river around the edge of the Common.

OS MAP REFERENCE: Sheet 153; TL 182 611

OUR MAP REFERENCE: C4 (see pages 26/27)

SIZE: 32 hectares

CONTACT: Countryside Services, Huntingdonshire District Council, Hinchingsbrooke Country Park, Brampton Road, Huntingdon, Cambs, PE29 6DB.

Tel: 01480 451568

Email: hinchingsbrookecountrypark@huntsdc.gov.uk

www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk



Upwood Meadows National Nature Reserve is a series of three old meadows growing on poorly drained chalky boulder clay. They have been grassland for at least 280 years, although the ridge and furrow left by ancient ploughs shows they were once arable land. The hedges and ponds support a wide variety of animal life, but the meadows themselves are of critical importance. Helen's Close is the first field. It was both sprayed and fertilised in the past, and at present there are few herbs growing in the grasses. Little Bentley Meadow was also partly 'improved', but a rich meadow flora still survives in the north west corner. Bentley Meadow, the largest of the three fields, has never been improved and is covered in the spring with the yellow of thousands of cowslips, followed in mid-May by the green-winged orchids. Over 180 species typical of ancient grassland grow in this field, a tiny remnant of the meadows, which were once common in England. The numerous anthills of the yellow ant are another indicator of ancient grassland.



LOCATION: From Ramsey take the road to Upwood and Great Raveley, and take the last turning on the right, into Upwood village. Where the road turns sharply right, continue straight ahead on the rough lane to Meadow Farm. Park in the grass car park and please close all gates. The numerous stiles still provide access to all meadows. Please note that cattle graze the reserve.

OS MAP REFERENCE: Sheet 142; TL 251 825

OUR MAP REFERENCE: C2 (see pages 26/27)

SIZE: 6 hectares

CONTACT: Managed by The Wildlife Trust, The Manor House, Broad St, Great Cambourne, Cambridge. CB23 6DH

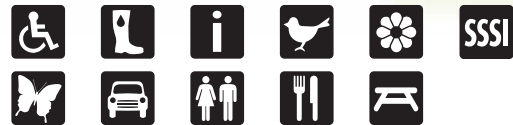
Tel: 01954 713500

Website: www.wildlifebcnp.org

www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk



Grafham Water, a Site of Special Scientific Interest, was the largest reservoir in England when it opened in the mid 1960s. The diverse habitats in the reserve were included in the original design and now support a variety of wildlife. Woods and grasslands provide food and shelter for summer songbirds, including blackcap, garden warbler and nightingale. In winter, the reservoir usually remains free of ice, attracting gadwall, wigeon, shoveler, goldeneye and goosander as well as great crested grebe. Many more wildfowl arrive when local gravel pits freeze. In spring, common sandpiper, greenshank and other migrant waders stop to feed on the reservoir margins. There are five hides in the reserve; two are accessible to wheelchair users throughout the year and another is generally accessible to wheelchairs in summer. The management programme is designed to maintain the diversity of habitats within the reserve, which include ancient and plantation woodland, meadows, ponds and grassland rides.



LOCATION: Grafham Water is between Huntingdon and St Neots; leave the A1 for the B661 at Buckden or the A14 at Ellington and follow the signs to Grafham Water. Anglian Water provides several car parks around the reservoir; there is a charge for their use. Mander car park in Pery to the southwest, is closest to the reservoir and the nature reserve. The 16.7km surfaced track which circles the reservoir is suitable for use by cycles, and in part, wheelchairs.

OS MAP REFERENCE: Sheet 153; TL 150 670

OUR MAP REFERENCE: B4/C4 (see pages 26/27)

SIZE: 149 hectares

CONTACT: Reserve managed by The Wildlife Trust, The Manor House, Broad St, Great Cambourne, Cambridge, CB23 6DH

Tel: 01480 811075 **Website:** www.wildlifebcnp.org
Visitor Centre & Café Tel: 01480 812154

www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk



Hinchingbrooke Country Park comprises 68 hectares of mature woodland, grassy meadows and wetlands. You might see hovering kestrels, foxes and butterflies amongst the wealth of wild flowers. All three species of British woodpecker can be seen here. The bird feeders by the Visitor's Centre are a good place to regularly see nuthatch and marsh tit. A variety of wildfowl can be seen on the lakes and signs of otters are now regularly found along Alconbury Brook.

Many of the footpaths are hard-surfaced and pushchair and wheelchair friendly. Electric wheelchairs are available from the Visitors' Centre along with refreshments, or have a barbecue or bring a picnic. Environmental events and children's activities are frequently organised and school visits are welcome. The park is always open and the Visitors' Centre is open 10am-4pm every day except Christmas Day. There is no charge to visit.

LOCATION: Located 2.5 km west of Huntingdon, almost 1km from Brampton. Driving out of Huntingdon towards Brampton, follow the signs to Hinchingbrooke Country Park. The entrance to the park is left at the roundabout by Hinchingbrooke Hospital. Frequent bus service from Huntingdon Town Centre to Hinchingbrooke Country Park/hospital. Short walk from the railway station.

OS MAP REFERENCE: Sheet 153; TL 221 726

OUR MAP REFERENCE: C3 (see pages 26/27)

SIZE: 68 hectares

CONTACT: Managed by Countryside Services, Huntingdonshire District Council, Hinchingbrooke Country Park, Brampton Road, Huntingdon, Cambs, PE29 6DB.

Tel: 01480 451568

Email: hinchingbrookecountrypark@huntsdc.gov.uk

www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk



Woodwalton Fen is one of Britain's oldest nature reserves, purchased in 1910 by the Hon. Charles Rothschild. The Fen has sometimes been called a 'waterland'. Indeed without the water, there would hardly be any wildlife, for it is home to many plants and animals that have become rare since the draining of the East Anglian Fens. The reserve lies at the lowest part of the Huntingdonshire fens. Over most of the fenland around Woodwalton and Holme fens, drainage from the Victorian times has caused the peat to shrink and waste away. In some places, ground level today is over 5 metres below that of 150 years ago. Over 400 plant species occur on the reserve. These include ragged robin, greater water parsnip, greater spearwort and marsh pea. Of the 1000 recorded beetles on the fen, nearly 200 are nationally rare. Almost half of Britain's dragonfly species are found here, and nearly a thousand species of moth. 170 species of birds have been recorded, including the long-eared owl.

Visitors are welcome to explore the reserve along the rides and three marked trails. One trail passes Charles Rothschild's 'bungalow' built in 1911. The Great Fen Project aims to link this National Nature Reserve with Holme Fen (see page 42 for more information).



LOCATION: Woodwalton Fen is a left turn off the B1040. Follow brown signs to the Woodwalton Fen. Drive to the end of the lane, where the fen lies straight ahead of you. Limited parking is available alongside the Great Raveley Drain. Unsuitable for coaches.

OS MAP REFERENCE: Sheet 142; TL 235 848

OUR MAP REFERENCE: C2 (see pages 26/27)

SIZE: 208 hectares

CONTACT: Managed by Natural England, Northminster House, Northminster Road Peterborough, PE1 1UA

Tel: 01733 455103

Websites: www.naturalengland.org.uk
www.greatfen.org.uk

www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk

A B C D E



26 A B C D E 27



Hanson and RSPB are working together over the next 30 years to create an exciting new nature reserve at Needingworth Quarry. The 700 hectare wetland site will be managed by the RSPB and will include the biggest reedbed in the UK. There will eventually be 32km of rights of way around and through the reserve. This will be a refuge for bittern, water vole and otter. Today, at the quarry, you can already see tufted duck, wigeon, shelduck and coot as well as the many wading birds, such as ringed plover. Many different types of insect can be seen on the reserve, especially during the summer months. The most colourful are the butterflies, dragonflies and damselflies. Footpaths around the quarry link up with the Huntingdonshire section of the Ouse Valley Way long distance walk. As part of the quarry development, 120,000 trees and shrubs have been planted, plus the quarry has received four 5 star and three gold awards from the Quarry Products Association for its environmental performance.

LOCATION: Hanson-RSPB Wetland Project is located in the village of Needingworth, near St Ives.

OS MAP REFERENCE: Sheet 153; TL 363 725

OUR MAP REFERENCE: D3 (see pages 26/27)

SIZE: To be 700 hectares

CONTACT: Managed by The RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire. SG19 2DL

Tel: 01603 661662

Website: www.rspb.org.uk

Site is currently under development, with access on public rights of way but the planned facilities are:



www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk



Paxton Pits Nature Reserve is a beautiful site of meadows, woodland and scrub, nestling on the banks of the River Great Ouse. It is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and is an important birdwatching site, with large numbers of nightingales to be heard in May each year. Other important birds at Paxton Pits include cormorants, gadwall, wigeon, tufted duck, pochard and mallard, with other wildfowl appearing in the cold and wet weather, when the Ouse Washes are frozen or flooded. The site is also host to a wealth of insects, from 26 species of butterfly to 148 species of spider. There are two guided trails, the Meadow Trail and the Heron Trail, as well as additional footpaths around the reserve which could be used to plan your walk. The Ouse Valley Way runs along the eastern edge of the reserve, and gives great views of the winter wildfowl on Washout Pit and Island Pit. The 10 acre arable field system has been set up to encourage farmland birds, wild flowers and mammals, such as yellow hammer and harvest mice. Following gravel extraction, Paxton Pits Nature Reserve will expand from 192 acres to more than 700 acres over the next decade.



LOCATION: Located in Little Paxton, at the end of the High Street. Take the turn to Little Paxton off the A1 and follow the nature reserve sign.

OS MAP REFERENCE: Sheet 153; TL 196 628

OUR MAP REFERENCE: C4 (see pages 26/27)

SIZE: 75 hectares

CONTACT: Managed by Countryside Services, Huntingdonshire District Council, Paxton Pits Nature Reserve, High Street, Little Paxton, St Neots, Cambs PE19 6ET.

Tel: 01480 406795

Website: www.paxton-pits.org.uk

Email: paxtonpits@btconnect.com

www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk

Barford Road Pocket Park



LOCATION: Near St Neots Leisure Centre, St Neots.

MAP REFERENCE: C4 (see pages 26/27)

SIZE: 18 hectares

CONTACT: Huntingdonshire District Council

Tel: 01480 406795

Website: www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk

Barford Road Pocket Park is 18 hectares of flood plain consisting of wild flower meadows, waterways and willow plantations. The willow plantations are planted with cricket bat willow. These are made into cricket bats, which are exported all over the world. The wild flower meadow is home to a good population of skylarks which are on the decrease in the area. The park also has kingfishers and terns and several different species of wading birds visit the edges of the waters on site. There is also an abundance of dragonflies such as the banded demoiselle along the backwater which runs off the River Great Ouse. The site is a great place to come and walk around on the network of hard-surfaced paths that weave through the park, as well as sitting to watch wildlife whilst having a picnic. There are no visitor facilities on site, but toilets are available in the Leisure Centre.

Holt Island Nature Reserve



LOCATION: Besides All Saints Church, St Ives.

MAP REFERENCE: D3 (see pages 26/27)

SIZE: 2.8 hectares

CONTACT: Huntingdonshire District Council

Tel: 01480 451568

Website: www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk

Holt Island Nature Reserve was once an osier bed used for making willow baskets. There are also areas of reed, sedge and the remnant orchard. It is in a very peaceful setting, reached by a footbridge across a backwater of the River Great Ouse. The island provides a wide range of habitats reflecting its riverside setting. Plants that you may see include the purple loosestrife, yellow flag iris and comfrey, plus nettles to provide food for the caterpillars of the tortoiseshell, peacock and red admiral butterflies.

Kingfishers are frequently seen and the scrub provides excellent cover for dunnoek, goldfinch, reed and sedge warblers. Holt Island is open at weekends and Bank Holidays between April and September, 10.30am - 5.00pm. At other times during these months the key is available from St Ivo Leisure Centre (tel: 01480 388500).

www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk

Spring Common



LOCATION: Off Ambury Road, behind Huntingdon Leisure Centre, Huntingdon.

MAP REFERENCE: C3 (see pages 26/27)

SIZE: 5.2 hectares

CONTACT: Huntingdonshire District Council

Tel: 01480 451568

Website: www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk

Covering over 5 hectares, Spring Common is within easy walking distance from Huntingdon town centre. The name originates from the running spring, which has become a natural place for people to gather. Today, it is an ideal location for enjoying quiet reflection, dog walking and other outdoor activities. A network of surfaced and grassy paths make it a good place to explore, and some wooden sculptures which were developed with the local schools, add more interest to the Common. Spring Common has a range of diverse habitats including grassland, marsh, ponds, streams and scrub. On a sunny day, butterflies and dragonflies can be seen in the grassland and marshy areas. The pond hosts many amphibians and the thick hawthorn and blackthorn hedges provide shelter and food for a variety of birds and animals.

The Thicket



LOCATION: Between Houghton and St Ives.

Access is via two entrances off the Thicket Path. The Thicket Path is accessed via Houghton, or at the end of the Waits in St Ives.

MAP REFERENCE: D3 (see pages 26/27)

SIZE: 2.5 hectares

CONTACT: Huntingdonshire District Council

Tel: 01480 451568

Website: www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk

The Thicket is a narrow, steep bank of ash and field maple woodland. It is approximately 500 metres long, and is home to a variety of native woodland animals and plants. Old maps of St Ives show that woodland has covered this area of hillside for a long time. This is proven by the presence of spurge laurel, which is considered to be an ancient woodland indicator. Sweet violet can be seen on sunny days in spring, or you may spot King Alfred's cakes growing on dead ash trees. Invertebrates, including the lesser stag beetle, are encouraged by the dead wood. Many of these species provide food for birds, such as the great spotted woodpecker.

Barnack Hills and Holes



LOCATION: In the village of Barnack, 11km north-west of Peterborough.

SIZE: 22 hectares

CONTACT: Natural England **Tel:** 01733 455103

The grassy slopes of Barnack Hills and Holes are home to a profusion of wild flowers. This type of meadowland covered in wild flowers is now all too rare, and this area became a National Nature Reserve in 1976. Barnack's rich flora supports a wide variety of wildlife, especially insects and a number of nationally rare species can be found. Butterflies recorded include the marbled white and chalkhill blue. Small mounds indicate the nests of the yellow meadow ant, and you may see the strange green lights of the glow-worms, which appear in large numbers on warm summer nights. Over 300 species of wild plant have been discovered here, including several kinds of orchid, many of them appearing in June and July. One of the rarest plants found on this grassland is the pasque flower. Visitors may like to follow the Limestone Walk, a circular 30 minute walk which takes you through all the main features of the reserve.

Wicken Fen



LOCATION: 15km south of Ely. **SIZE:** 550 hectares

CONTACT: The National Trust **Tel:** 01353 720274

Website: www.nationaltrust.org.uk

Wicken Fen National Nature Reserve is a remnant of real fenland. A superb variety of fenland plants and animals can be seen here including nearly 5000 species of invertebrates. Birds include winter visitors like the rough legged buzzard and bittern, as well as summer residents of wetland and scrub, such as reed and sedge warblers, hobby and marsh harriers.

Fowlmere Nature Reserve

LOCATION: 11.2km south of Cambridge, between Fowlmere and Melbourn. **SIZE:** 40 hectares

MAP REFERENCE: E5 (see pages 26/27)

CONTACT: RSPB **Tel:** 01763 208978

Website: www.rspb.org.uk

Fowlmere Nature Reserve is an isolated area of fen on the South Cambridgeshire chalk, surrounded by farmland. Woodland, chalk grassland, reedbed and open water flowing from natural springs, attract a wide variety of birds and insects. Education programmes for children can be booked.

www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk

Ouse Washes and Welney



LOCATION: At Wimblington, take the B103 to Manea. Follow signs to Reserve, via the Welney or RSPB entrances.

SIZE: 1274.5 hectares

CONTACT: The Wildlife Trust Tel: 01954 713500
RSPB Tel: 01354 680212

Wildfowl & Wetland Trust Tel: 01353 860711

Website: www.rspb.org.uk
www.wildlifebcnp.org
www.wwt.org.uk

The Ouse Washes are a wide strip of permanent grassland, running for 33km from Earith in the southwest to Denver in the northeast. Regular winter flooding improves the washland for summer grazing and hay cut, and provides vast areas of shallow water, which are of international importance to wintering waterfowl. Large numbers of teal, pintail, wigeon, shoveler, pochard and Bewick's swan may be seen in the winter. In summer, ruff, black-tailed godwit, lapwing, redshank and snipe breed in the rough grassland. It is probably the best site in Cambridgeshire for dragonflies, with species including variable damselfly and hairy dragonfly.

The Lodge at Sandy



LOCATION: 1 mile east of Sandy on the B1042

MAP REFERENCE: C5 (see pages 26/27)

SIZE: 43 hectares

CONTACT: RSPB Tel: 01767 680551

Website: www.rspb.org.uk

The reserve at The Lodge is a mixture of woodland, heathland and grassland, and includes the formal gardens of the RSPB's headquarters. You can watch birds on the feeders, all year round from the hide. Occasionally, siskins and great spotted woodpeckers visit the feeders. Dartford warblers and natterjack toads can occasionally be seen or heard on the newly created heathland. The formal gardens are peat free and run by organic farming methods. The RSPB shop stocks a wide range of gifts, books, optics, clothing and souvenirs, and a variety of garden birds visit the feeding station. A series of events are held throughout the year, including guided walks and family fun days.

The Ouse Valley Way



The Ouse Valley Way follows the route of the River Great Ouse from its source near Brackley in Northamptonshire to the sea at Kings Lynn. This magnificent 250km walk is one of the longest river valley walks in Britain. You will walk through beautiful riverside scenery, tranquil English villages, nature reserves, country parks and historic market towns, and admire the unique landscape of the Fens. The walk can be undertaken in one go, or in shorter walks that can be completed in one day. The 26 mile stretch through Huntingdonshire is particularly beautiful. You'll pass by the old mill in Eaton Socon, now a pub, and walk through St Neots' peaceful Riverside Park, arriving at Paxton Pits Nature Reserve, famous for its nightingales. Continuing along the riverbank for most of the way, the Ouse Valley Way takes you through some of the finest riverside meadows in Britain, following the river as it winds its way past the impressive spires of the churches of Offord D'Arcy and Cluny. You then reach the ancient town of Godmanchester with its

Roman origins and interesting old buildings and then pass literally underneath one of the few working watermills still left on the Ouse, Houghton Mill. Here you make your way on to the bustling, picturesque market town of St Ives. There is a gentle riverside walk, which leads to the beautiful village of Holywell and the (allegedly haunted) Ferry Boat Inn.



After crossing the Greenwich Meridian line, you'll see the landscape open up as you approach the Cambridgeshire Fens. You'll be passing through typical flat landscape, with fields of black soil and endless skies offering views across the fenland. It's a land full of history and on a misty, autumnal day or with a dramatic dawn or sunset, it can be a magical and mysterious place.

A pack of six circular walks covering the 26 miles through Huntingdonshire is available to buy.



CONTACT: Huntingdonshire District Council, Hinchingsbrooke Country Park, Brampton Road, Huntingdon, Cambs, PE29 6DB

Tel: 01480 451568

Website: www.ousevalleyway.org.uk

The Great Fen Project



The Great Fen Project aims to restore over 3700 hectares of fenland habitat between Huntingdon and Peterborough. This will be achieved by obtaining land adjacent to two existing National Nature Reserves, Holme Fen and Woodwalton Fen. Connecting these two vitally important nature reserves will provide a haven for wildlife and create a massive green space for people, opening new opportunities for recreation, education and business.

The wetland will safeguard threatened habitats and wildlife. Rare species such as fen violet, bittern and water vole will once again inhabit its ditches, reed beds and meres.

The project will also play an important and inherent part in flood prevention planning. As the Great Fen Project progresses and more land is restored to fenland habitat, it will provide more flood storage areas. This will further protect land and property in the area. The Great Fen will be an inspirational place to visit, a mosaic of open water, reedbeds, grassland and woodland with sudden and surprising changes in landscape, where it will be possible to wander all day without retracing your footsteps.

This is a long-term project managed in partnership by the Environment Agency, Huntingdonshire District Council, Middle Level Commissioners and the local Wildlife Trust.

For more information on the Great Fen Project, contact 01954 713513, email info@greatfen.org or visit www.greatfen.org.uk. Map Reference C2/C3.



Birdwatching in Huntingdonshire



Introduction

Huntingdonshire is a great district for those interested in wildlife. For birdwatchers in particular wetlands are the main bird habitat. These include the Cambridgeshire Fens, the Great Ouse Valley and Grafham Water. Several good woodland sites including some ancient woodlands are home to many different birds and animals. Around 240 species of birds can be spotted around Huntingdonshire and some of them are detailed below.

Wetland Birds

Divers turn up regularly at Grafham Water in winter and we usually see the rarer grebes such as red necked on our gravel pits in spring and autumn.

Cormorants breed at Paxton Pits Nature Reserve



and there are a few other small colonies locally. They can be seen at the nest from December to July. A breeding colony was established by a single pair in 1988. Numbers increased rapidly during the early 1990s to 180-200 pairs during 1994-98, but

have since stabilised, fluctuating between 100 and 180 pairs. Paxton Pits is also used as a roost by wintering cormorants, which appear to be almost entirely different individuals from those that breed. The peak winter count was 1153 in January 1997, though the average is about 400 birds. Hard weather in eastern England tends to concentrate most of the Ouse Valley's cormorants at the Paxton Pits roost, though ringing indicates that Paxton's wintering birds include individuals hatched at Rutland Water, Besthorpe (Nottinghamshire), Abberton Reservoir (Essex) and Jylland (Denmark). It is still unusual for British cormorants to breed inland in large numbers and it is thought that the introduction of rainbow trout into Grafham water may have been the trigger to get the tree-nesting Paxton Pits colony started. Despite the nesting colony on site, Paxton Pits still hold plenty of fish to support grebes and saw-bill ducks, as well as otters.

Bitterns over-winter at several sites, and they have



recently been heard booming in the fens. As the projects by the RSPB/Hanson, Natural England, the Wildlife Trust, the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, The National Trust and Huntingdonshire District Council develop, Huntingdonshire should become a stronghold for the species in the next decade. In winter bitterns are regularly seen at Paxton Pits Nature Reserve, Fen Drayton, Woodwalton Fen and Wicken Fen, and they may occasionally breed.

GREY HERON



Little Egrets now occur at almost all of our wetland sites, though they have not bred yet.

Grey Herons are widespread, but most heronries are small with less than 3 or 4 nests. Up to 12 pairs nest in the cormorant colony at Paxton Pits Nature Reserve.

Geese and **ducks** can be seen in large numbers at the Ouse Washes and Welney in winter, but their distribution depends on water levels. In the gravel pits, there is always water and every winter you can find **smew**, **goosander** and **goldeneye** at Paxton Pits Nature Reserve. Other sites have big flocks of dabbling ducks such as **wigeon** and **teal**.



WIGEON
IN FLIGHT

Garganey turn up each spring at most of the popular wildfowl sites, but they rarely stay. However, if the Ouse Washes are flooded, but not too deep, then you can expect a bonanza of **pintail**, **shoveller** and other dabbling ducks there.

GOLDENEYE



WATER RAIL

Water rail can turn up almost anywhere but to get the best views, Fowlmere Nature Reserve and Woodwalton Fen are probably the best locations. Water rail don't like open spaces so never stray far from cover. **Kingfishers** are to be seen all along the Ouse Valley Way, especially near sluices, weirs, locks and mill streams where there is more flow. These are also the places to find **grey wagtails**. Godmanchester, Houghton Mill or near Buckden marina are good places to look.

GREY WAGTAIL



Birds of Prey

Marsh harriers are rapidly expanding their range in those areas where habitat is being created for **bitterns** and other wetland species. They even breed well away from water on occasions. The best views are guaranteed at Woodwalton Fen and Wicken Fen, but you may see them on any drive through fenland in summer.



Buzzards were absent from Huntingdonshire until quite recently but they now breed in many woodland locations throughout the area.

Red kites now breed in Huntingdonshire as a result of a re-introduction scheme in nearby Rockingham Forest.

Hobbies gather over our wetlands in spring and you might see over ten at a time at places like Paxton Pits Nature Reserve and Fen Drayton.



Farmland Birds

Corn buntings and **tree sparrows** are both very localised. The best places to find them are at feeding stations such as at the RSPB's Ouse Washes Reserve but look on wires as you pass fenland farms. Corn buntings also sing from the wires at Portholme Meadow, between Godmanchester and Huntingdon.

Lapwing and **golden plover** can often be seen in wet arable fields and meadows. Holme Fen can be a good place to look for **siskins** and **redpolls** in winter.



Songbirds

Nightingales breed in scrubland at several sites including Paxton Pits Nature Reserve and Grafham Water. Paxton Pits are well known for its nightingales which return each spring and attract visitors from all over the UK. The reserve holds up to 30 singing males. They are quite secretive birds but their song is loud and varied, quite unlike any other songbird.



We hope that you enjoy your visit to Huntingdonshire and find time to unwind, spending a few days discovering the hidden charms of many of the best nature reserves in lowland England.

We would like to thank the following people and organisations for the use of their photographs in this guide:

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| Barry Dickerson | Pat Doody |
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| The Wildlife Trust | |



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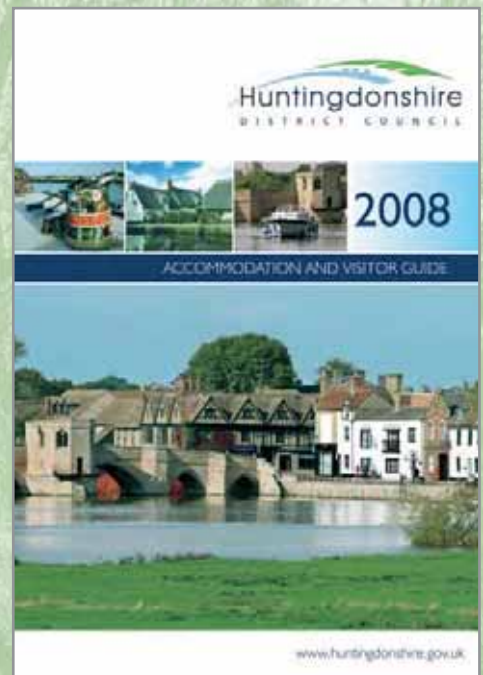
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Please return your completed questionnaire to **Communications & Marketing, Huntingdonshire District Council, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, Cambs, PE29 3TN.**

A random draw will be made by the end of November 2008 and the end of November 2009 and the winner will be contacted. You must be over 18 to enter. Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC) is registered with the Data Protection Act 1998 for the purpose of processing personal data. Any data you provide on this form will be used to monitor and improve the services offered by the Countryside Department of HDC. Your personal data will not be passed on to other parties. If you have any other concern about the processing of personal data by HDC, please contact the Data Protection Officer at HDC or the office of the Information Commissioner at Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF.

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If you need information on places to stay, attractions, Huntingdonshire's heritage, riverside and our historic market towns please call for a free copy of the Huntingdonshire Accommodation and Visitor Guide.

Tel: **01480 388588**

or visit our website

www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk



www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk

Getting here

Rail Enquiries: 08457 484950

Bus and Coach Enquiries: 08705 808080

Traveline (bus/coach/rail): 0870 6082608

Or see the map on pages 26 and 27

For information on accommodation, attractions and events, visit our website or contact:

Huntingdonshire District Council

Tel: 01480 388588

Email: Hunts.TIC@huntsdc.gov.uk

St Neots Tourist Information Centre

The Old Court, 8 New Street, St Neots,
Cambs PE19 1AE

Tel: 01480 388788

Fax: 01480 388791

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**For last minute accommodation availability, call the
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Electronic Tourist Information Kiosks

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Ramsey: Great Whyte

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