

## AN EASY WALK AROUND A BRILLIANT TOWN CENTRE NATURE RESERVE

This place has been showing people nature for years. Many years ago, I stumbled across a Citrine Wagtail here, the only one I have ever seen in the UK. But it's about much more than birds. There is heathland, reedbed, bog, wet woodland and old coppice for a start!

Park in the car park found by turning off the A3013 between Fleet and Cove at the bridge for Fleet Pond. After crossing the railway bridge turn right and follow the new road to the car park. Take the waymarked track from the railway side of the car park. This walk is suggested in an anti-clockwise direction around the pond.

The first thing you notice is the heathland on the left and silver birch woodland on the right. The heath has a lot of Gorse and will be colourful when it flowers. The heather, including bell heather (which always looks a brighter pink to me), is quite prominent after a while. Keep on the track until you pass an information board and get a first view of the Pond.

From here you will be following the posts with yellow markers all the way along the north side of the pond the markers are studs on the ground but basically you just follow the path! The only place you could go wrong is where the path forks after the fishing platforms near the station but take the left hand option, you are circling the lake. Later on if you want a longer walk you can follow the blue post markers, they visit more heathland and increase the walk by half a mile or so but return to the yellow route. The main track you follow is easy to find and if in doubt always keep left, close to the edge of the pond.

You will see *phragmites australis*, common reed and *typha latifolia*, reedmace **or bullrush**, the two types of reed growing around the Pond. The former is, in my view the most valuable because the Reed Warbler uses it to nest and other birds are attracted to it like Sedge Warbler and rarer species that may turn up.

There are plenty of information boards and benches to sit on and some great viewing points. From all vantage points you will see birds on the water. They are well fed here by visitors but it's best to take proper food and not just old bread. There is a grass opening at one point with a view of the Pond, called Sandy Bay and with many seats where you could stop for a picnic or just rest.

Further around you will see a sign about 'Sandy Hill Copse'. This area has old oak trees and hazel coppicing, a method of making fencing and other practical uses in days past. There are some old coppiced trees and some newer versions to look at. Conservationists know the value of these habitats for all kinds of nature, an information board tells you about it.

Stay on this main track, follow the yellow markers, there are short cuts to the car park but at worst, you will end up at the first information board and can return on the main track.