

# Lightwater Country Park

## A special heathland park with ponds and meadows

Enter the Park via the road entrance at The Avenue, Lightwater, GU18 5TS. Follow the road past the pond, past the café through the trees on your right then turn right and find a parking space. There are toilets and the café and an information centre.

Return to the park entrance on foot via the café and woodland or road. The pond always has birds on it, from ducks to geese and black-headed gulls. Take the path nearest to the entrance around the pond, it's broad and very well used. Carry on through the trees without turning and take a look at the end of the second pond as you can expect some water birds to be present there. Coot, moorhen and mallard are very likely. After looking here take the path to the left which leads to the bigger Hammond's Pond, much less disturbed and more natural than the others. There will be yellow water-lilies in the summer months, dragonflies, butterflies and birds in the trees and on the water.

Skirt the pond a little but head out of the back, on the main path, near the fishing platforms and it leads to a fenced path where you should turn right. Now, on your left is an enclosure used for the goats that graze on the heath and help manage the unwanted growth. If successful they will allow the heather to flourish. At the end of this path turn left. Along here there will be flowers, butterflies and birds singing at the right time of year. Listen and look for birds all year though, they are always nearby. The path opens out into the heath, to the sound of the motorway on your right. If you block out the sound this is a pleasant walk along the edge of the heath. Pass the bridge on the right that heads over to Bagshot. The heath gets better in quality as you go and you are along a mainly silver birch lined path.

As the wide path turns into the heath look for a small gap in the hedge on your right, a narrow path here leads down into a quiet area. I found a lot of birdlife, especially chiffchaffs and willow warblers in summer but linnets and stonechats are also present. At the bottom prepare for possible mud as you pass through a willow and downy birch thicket where the birds will get quite close if you're quiet.

Emerging the other side the heath opens out and is beautiful when the heather is in bloom. Earlier in the year the gorse will add some colour. You may be lucky enough to hear Dartford warbler here or see them darting around just over the tops of the heather. I spent some time looking at butterflies along this path, mainly holly blue but on heath you may find silver-studded blue in June or July.

As you approach woodland the path divides and you take the left path which quickly drops down in the woodland. A small stream crosses the path, it may need a small jump to cross it after heavy rain unless you have waterproof shoes or boots. The path quickly rises again up a short steep hill and you follow it slightly left towards more open heath. The path is not so easy to see due to heather growth, it has a few holes and careful steps are needed. This is a pretty section with some nice Scots pine trees to pass on your left.

In addition to butterflies I found day flying moths here including a Silver Y. Follow the path to the top of the hill and pass through the gorse and where the path splits turn right to the main track. A short way along a seat will give you a chance to rest and enjoy an elevated view of the heath. When rested continue along the path in the same direction you were going in. At the bottom of the slope turn left. Next you have a choice. If you like the heath and want more of it turn quickly left and right and follow the path past trees and heath back to the start. You will be on a wide track and pass the sports fields on your right. At the end of the fields your car will be on the right on the rough roadway where you left it with a café and possible rewards closeby.

If, like me, you want to see more of the nature the park offers stay on the path with the woodland on your right and pass the areas of meadow where butterflies, flowers and insects can entertain you. Look around and you will see mountain ash trees (rowan) full of berries in late summer, food for our birds! I enjoy rooting around in the grass looking for different flowers, birds foot trefoil, tufted vetch and St John's Wort, probably ragwort are going to be easy enough to spot. Also, grasshoppers are fun to follow and photograph, if you're quick enough!

Heading in this direction will take you back to the roadway you came in on and your car will be on the rough roadway on your left with the café to your right.

Although this is a very popular place most people do little other than check out the ponds and playground and visit the café. Dog walking is often mainly on the wide tracks so enjoy a little more exploration and see some extra nature.