

Aldershot Park, Tongham Pond and Tice's Meadow

A must for birdwatchers, many wetland birds, wildflowers, reeds, bird hides and a bird feeding station.

Take binoculars and a camera if you have them.

Start at Aldershot Park where there is a car park (GU12 4BP) and a public toilet . Walk towards the park and after you pass the water, which often has some friendly ducks, Moorhen and Coot, turn left on the path and then right into the woodland just before the bench. Listen and look here for woodland birds like Treecreeper and Nuthatch. Keep roughly going right and quickly emerge from the woodland, turn left after the building and then right to follow the woodland edge at the end of the sports pitches. You meet the tiny Blackwater River (just a stream) here and turn left. Follow this path following the river to the end and turn right over the concrete bridge.

Turn right immediately with the river on your right to go down a rough permissive path used mainly by people walking their dogs. After about 50 metres take the less than obvious left turn off the main path. The land and Pool are publicly owned and await expenditure to improve the access and paths. This path is quite long, not well maintained but follows the side of Tongham Pond. Watch out for low branches and vegetation trip hazards. There are occasional places to visit the side of the pond.

Follow this path down the side of the pool. On the way you can expect to see a variety of water birds, in winter there are hundreds of ducks such as Gadwall, Wigeon, Teal and Tufted Duck. Great Crested Grebes can be seen sometimes carrying young on their backs in summer. Mute Swans are ever present. Cormorants use the overhead wires to perch. Herons are often hiding in the reeds and bushes. The reeds also hold Reed Warblers in summer. This whole area is full of wildlife.

Kingfishers are also seen here and often can be seen perched at the waters edge so look carefully when you have a view.

At the far end of the pool you reach a footpath T junction and take the left turn. Keep ahead up a slight slope and at the footpath crossroads turn right across the bridge and then left, over the culvert and along the made up path. Over to your left is the new service station at the foot of the Blackwater Valley Road the A331.

Keep walking on this path passing houses on your right until you see a metal gate on your left into Tice's Meadow Nature Reserve just after house number 269. Enter here and follow the path taking the first footpath on the left - do not cross the bridge on the right. This area of scrub and meadow holds many birds and the insects in summer are varied and easy to see. Wildflowers are abundant. At the end of the path is a footbridge which you should cross and go almost straight ahead but slightly right and follow the path down towards the water.

Turn right at the bottom, check the pool on your right, water lilies flower here and soon you will reach the path to the public hide on the left. The approach path is often flooded. From here you can see breeding gulls and terns in summer, many ducks and wading birds in spring

and late summer/autumn. At times of passage hundreds of swifts pass through and at all times birds of prey can be seen including Buzzard, Red Kite, Sparrowhawk, Kestrel, Hobby and less often, Peregrine Falcon and even Goshawk. After using the hide, if you can, keep going along the track and after the right turn you have the option of turning left up the short hill up what's known as Horton's Mound to the lookout seats and shelter there.

This is a sociable place. The local people are very friendly, will tell you what you can see and also point it out! At this point you have a better view of the meadow, often used for grazing but again birds like Meadow Pipits, Wheatears on passage, even Little Ringed Plover on the pool edges could be seen. If you turn right out of the shelter you can visit Bell's Piece a small wildflower meadow planted by the local volunteers.

Follow the path in a loop and at the bottom of the hill take the first path sharp left under the trees and left again. Stop off to look for birds on the way, on the left you will see a viewing point with a memorial bench and a swift tower, built by the local people and erected by volunteers from SEEBoard. It has solar speakers making swift calls in summer to attract them to the nest holes so make sure you see the birds and don't go only by the sound!! Looking right from here you can also see a Barn Owl nest box. In the distance on the right is Badshot Lea Kiln a place with successful Barn Owl and Kestrel nesting boxes, birds that can be seen over the reserve.

As you near the end of the reserve, take the obvious path to the right, and turn sharp right again along a track into the woodland. Watch out for the bird feeding station on the left, behind wooden panels. In winter it attracts many birds of different species including the beautiful Bullfinch. Information boards help you identify them.

Continue until you come to a footbridge which you cross, and turn left and retrace your steps out onto the path you came in on. Turn right and return to Aldershot Park. You will cross over the culvert and take the next left into the park on the opposite edge to where you left it. The park grounds often have many Pied wagtails on the grass. Also, watch out for Mistle Thrushes that are very often seen here in family groups, feeding on the ground if it's soft enough to provide worms!

You will see the car park across the sports fields.

