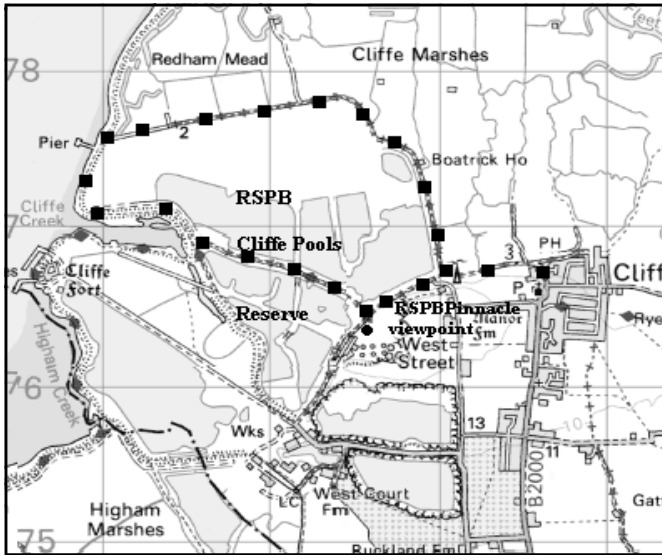


Wildlife trail map

Leaving St Helens Church turn left at the Six Bells and walk down Pond Hill to the marshes.



Star species

Watch elegant avocets scooping up microscopic aquatic life with their sickle shaped beaks. They nest in mini colonies on saline lagoons. See the little egrets fishing in the channels stirring up fish fry from the muddy bottom with their feet. Turtle doves can still be seen and heard at Cliffe in the spring and summer. Listen for their gentle purring from the hedges.



Turtle Dove

Watch the lapwings chase predators who come too close to their nest. These protective parents regularly give chase to crows and do not stop 'mobbing' them until the danger has passed. Nightingales breed in hedgerows and scrub, listen for their incredibly rich musical song in late April or May. If you are lucky you may spot one sitting in the foliage.



Lapwing



Grey Heron



Nightingale

Look out for the grey herons feeding on the wildlife in the ditches. The UK's largest breeding heronry is close by at RSPB's Northward Hill. In spring see the cherry orchard in blossom and the bluebells in the ancient woodland where you will also hear nightingales. There are evening visits to the breeding heronry. A full programme of North Kent Marshes events is listed in the RSPB North Kent Marshes events guide.

**For more information please contact
RSPB North Kent Marshes Team
01634 222480
www.rspb.org.uk**

**Friends of the North Kent Marshes
www.northkentmarshes.org.uk**

North Kent Marshes Self Guided Trails Cliffe Four Seasons Wildlife Heritage Trail

Distance approximately 5 miles



Avocet

A circular trail taking in some of Cliffe's famous wildlife heritage along the way and each season brings a different experience.

Other trails in this series;

Farming Heritage Trail
Military Heritage Trail
Heritage Buildings Trail
Industrial Heritage Trail

Literary Heritage along the Saxon Shore Way



Four seasons at RSPB Cliffe Pools

In spring the air is filled with birdsong as they compete to establish territories and attract a mate. In summer look out for young birds making their first venture into the outside world. Autumn brings large movements of migrating birds - some heading south to a warmer climate, others seeking refuge in the UK from the cold arctic winter. In winter look out for large flocks of birds gathering to feed, or flying at dusk to form large roosts to keep warm.



Avocet



Redshank

Spring

At the brackish pools and grassland near Boatwick House, breeding lapwings and redshanks gather with dabbling ducks, marshland warblers, corn and reed buntings, linnets, stonechats and skylarks. The Saline lagoons have breeding avocets and common terns in most years plus great crested grebes. View the pools and lagoons to see migrant waders like greenshanks and spotted redshanks. The scrub holds warblers, owls, nightingales and turtle doves. There is an excellent display of blooming hawthorn from the Pinnacle viewpoint.



Lapwing



Nightingale



Dunlin



Fieldfare

Summer

At the brackish pools and saline lagoons a superb range of returning migrant waders can be seen, including flocks of up to 800 blacktailed godwits and avocets with green wood-common and curlew sandpipers, little stints, spotted redshanks, greenshanks and occasional rarities, with flocks of up to 600 shelducks and 100 little grebes and up to 60 little egrets feeding around the pools.



Greenshank



Blacktailed Godwit



Shelduck



Little Egret

In the scrub and grasslands there is a good range of insects rare bumblebees especially the shrill carder bee and brown-banded carder bee. There are many butterflies such as marbled white, common blue, comma, Essex skipper, the migrant clouded yellow and also grasshoppers and crickets, including Roesels bush cricket. There are many common flower species such as wild carrot, birds foot trefoil and melilot.

Autumn

Numbers of migrant waders tend to diminish on the pools at the end of September and are replaced by wintering waders such as dunlin and grey plovers. Summer songbirds head south whilst winter thrushes - redwings and fieldfares - move in from the north. It's a good time to sea-watch on the Thames with skuas and sometimes petrels seen, especially in strong north-westerlies. In the scrub and grasslands the last of the years insects can be seen, late dragonflies include ruddy darters and migrant hawkers, there are late bush crickets and the last of the years butterflies include wall browns and small tortoiseshells.



Grey Plover



Marsh Harrier

Winter

Winter wader duck numbers build up on the pools and lagoons with impressive high tide roosts of up to 7,000 dunlin 2,000 lapwing with other species including redshanks and grey plovers. Wet winters can see up to 3,000 dabbling ducks including teals, wigeon, shovelers, mallard, gadwall, and pintails. Coots, pochard and tufted ducks build up into the low hundreds with smaller numbers of goldeneyes Hen and marsh harriers, merlins and peregrines hunt in the scrub and grassland areas while winter thrush and finches flock around the hawthorns.



Merlin



Peregrine Falcon