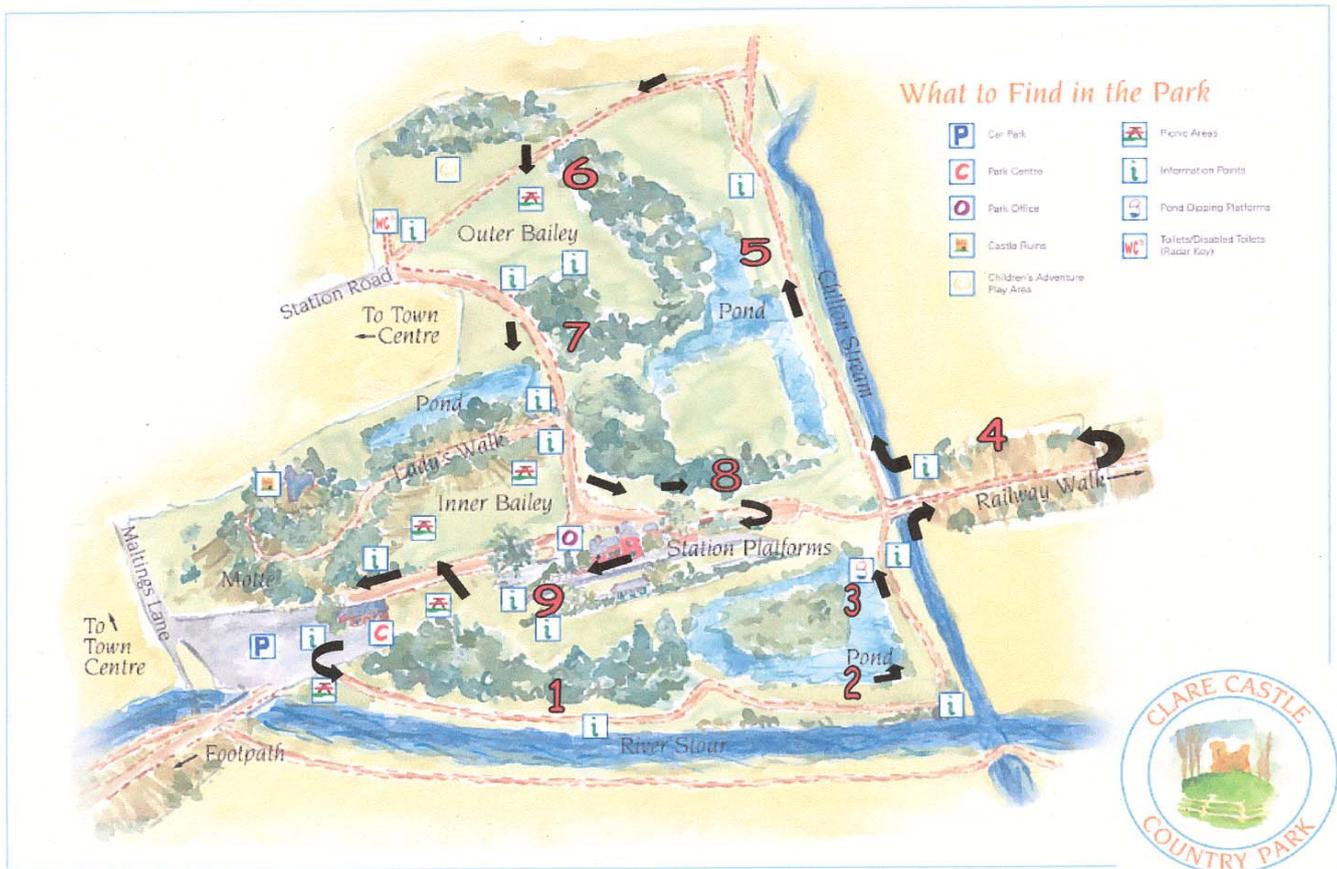


CLARE CASTLE COUNTRY PARK

NATURE TRAIL GUIDE

Start this Nature Trail by taking the river path from the car park and follow the route as shown by the arrows on the map.



1 This part of the river was diverted from the main River Stour to provide power for a water mill further down stream.

Alder trees grow along the riverbank. Seeds from the small cones provide a valuable winter food source for finches and other small birds.



Alder Cones

During summer, the pointed leaves and white flowers of the Arrowhead can be seen emerging from the water alongside the flat floating leaves and the yellow flowers of the Yellow Water Lily.

Arrowhead



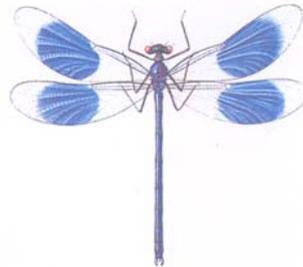


Moorhen

Water birds to look out for in this area are Mute Swan, Mallard duck and Moorhen.

Roach, Pike and Chubb, can all be found in this stretch of river.

Dragonflies and Damselflies are abundant from early summer through to autumn and can often be seen resting on waterside vegetation.



Banded Demoiselle Damselfly



Common Hawker Dragonfly

Continue up a slope, with a pond on your left and the river on your right.

2

Kingfishers can sometimes be seen here, although your only view may be a flash of blue as one speeds by.



Kingfisher

You might be lucky enough to see a Little Grebe, they spend much of their time underwater catching small fish.

Now the path enters a woodland area.

Several different species of tree grow here. Try to identify them.



Ash



Elder



Sycamore



Oak



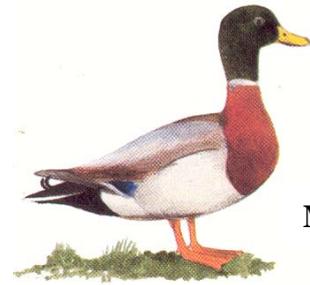
Hazel



Aspen

3

The Country Park ponds attract many species of wildfowl. Mallard ducks are resident all year and are joined by Tufted ducks, Pochard and Teal in the winter. In the summer Canada Geese, Mute Swan and Moorhen nest by the waters edge while Coot build a floating nest.



Mallard



Treecreeper

Look out for a Treecreeper a small bird that climbs the trunk of a tree in a spiralling fashion searching for insects in bark crevices.

You may spot a Grass Snake swimming in the water as it hunts for its favourite food – frogs.



Grass Snake

Frogs and toads are abundant and are mainly seen (and heard) in the early spring when spawning takes place around the pond margins.

In the pond itself many insects can be found. Try catching some using a net from the pond dipping area. You should find Water Boatmen, Dragonfly nymphs and Water Scorpion. **Please return all you catch.**



Garlic Mustard

Many wild flowers like to grow around the damp pond edges. The pink Lady's Smock or 'Cuckoo Flower' and the white Garlic Mustard are in bloom during May.



Lady's Smock

When you reach the old railway line cross the iron bridge over the Chilton Stream and explore the old railway.

4

This area of the Country Park is home to many important and unusual plants, many of which provide food for insects.

IT IS IMPORTANT NOT TO PICK THE WILD FLOWERS.

The growth of wild flowers is encouraged by controlling scrub encroachment and annual mowing.



Common Broomrape

Early in the year Cowslips, Violets and Coltsfoot are flowering followed in the summer by Ox-eye Daisy, Field Scabious, Birds foot trefoil and Common Knapweed. More unusual plants to be found are the Greater Knapweed and the parasitic Broomrape together with the occasional Bee Orchid.



Bee Orchid



Orange Tip

The wild flowers of this area attract many butterflies. Look out for the yellow Brimstone and Orange tip in the spring.

Summer butterflies include Ringlet and Meadow Brown. Also in the late summer look out for Skipper butterflies, which are small, orange and moth like and fly very fast.



Small Skipper

Other things to look out for along the Railway Walk are Common Lizard and many types of insect including Grass Hoppers and Soldier Beetles.

Although the Nature Trail does not continue along the Railway Walk it is worth exploring further if you wish.

To continue the trail go back over the iron bridge and turn right.

5

The trail continues through an area of mixed trees. Notice the tall Aspen trees to your left. Their leaves tremble in even the slightest breeze.



Jackdaw

The area across the pond to your left is a wildlife refuge and is an area of the Country Park where public access is restricted to give birds and animals an undisturbed environment. Shyer animals such as Muntjac Deer and Foxes visit this area and many species of bird find safe nesting sites in the trees and bushes. Notice the Kestrel nest box on the pole, although Jackdaws normally inhabit it!

As you continue on your way you will find a small area of open land running down to the pond edge. This area is being developed into a wildflower meadow. In the summer Reedmace (Bulrush), Great Willowherb and the fragrant Meadowsweet grow along the pond edge.



Great Willowherb

Summer visiting Sedge and Reed Warblers will nest in this area and you can hear their chattering calls throughout the summer.

Look out for the Spotted Flycatcher, also a summer visitor. This bird flies repeatedly out from its favourite perch to catch an insect, then returning to the same spot.

As the path turns left you can see a Weeping Ash tree on the edge of a small graveyard.

Continue up the slope to emerge onto an open area of grass, which was once the outer Bailey of Clare Castle.

6

This area is rich in earthworms and you will see evidence of Mole activity as they tunnel beneath the surface searching for the worms.

Blackbirds and Thrushes also forage for worms particularly when they are feeding young. During the summer Swallows skim the surface of the grass disturbing then catching insects while overhead flocks of Swifts can be seen flying over the Town.



Song Thrush

Cross the open area to join the driveway by the bowling green. Turn left.

7

As you join the driveway you will pass a small copse of Silver Birch trees. One of the first wild flowers to be seen in the spring is the Lesser Celandine and you will find them in abundance in this area.



Lesser Celandine

As you pass the pond (part of the former Castle moat) Yellow Flag Iris can be seen around the waters edge. Pause here in the spring and you will probably here Toads 'croaking' as they pair up ready to spawn. This is another good place to catch a glimpse of a Kingfisher.



Yellow Flag Iris

You now pass between the Castle ramparts which are covered with bushes of Blackthorn, Hawthorn and Elder. These all produce berries in the late summer and autumn, which are a valuable food supply for birds in the winter to come. Blackbirds and Thrushes are joined by winter visiting Fieldfares and Redwings to feast on these berries.

PLEASE DO NOT PICK BERRIES IN THE PARK THEY ARE AN ESSENTIAL FOOD SUPPLY FOR BIRDS IN THE WINTER

Opposite the old station building there is a large yew tree with its dark green needle-like foliage. Yew is one of the longest living trees and is steeped in folklore. All parts of the tree are poisonous although birds enjoy the fleshy part of the berries.

Turn left at the old station to find the Butterfly area.

8

In the butterfly area you will find plants that have flowers rich in nectar and so attract many species of butterfly. The area is at its best in the late summer when the Buddleia attracts Small Tortoiseshell, Comma and Red Admiral in abundance with migrants such as the and Humming Bird Hawk Moth often putting in an appearance.

Notice also the 'bug houses', which are used by nesting insects such as Solitary Bees in the summer and hibernating insects such as Ladybirds and Lacewings in the winter.

Turn right before the wooden footbridge and walk between the old railway platforms.



Maidenhair Spleenwort

The brickwork of the platform walls is a special habitat for some interesting plants. Madenhair Spleenwort, likes the shady damp wall while the yellow flowered Yellow Corydalis prefers the sunny side. The trailing Ivy Leaved Toadsflax with its small purple flower is ideally adapted to growing on walls.

9

Look up into the large Ash Trees behind the station and you will see large nests. In the spring this 'Rookery' is alive with the sound of squabbling Rooks as they compete for nesting space and later the squawking of the young Rooks, as they demand food.

In the spring, beneath the Ash trees, you will see bluebells flowering. You may also find the unusual flower of the Lords and Ladies, which latter in the year produces clusters of red berries on top of a short stem. Look out for Grey Squirrels and the Greater Spotted Woodpecker in this area.

Lords and Ladies



You have now finished the Nature Trail. You will find more information about the Country Park in the Visitor Centre.