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# WILDLIFE OF THE ELY TRAIL

This leaflet will help you to identify some of the more common plants, animals and birds along the Ely Trail. There are many places to view the river. Take a moment to stop and look and listen for wildlife, you will be surprised how much you can find. Click on images to find out more...

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## KEY

-  Parking
-  Ely Trail





# RED ADMIRAL

This dramatically coloured butterfly is one of the easiest to recognise. The black of the wing is contrasted with the bright red cross-lines and white patches. A closer look reveals small blue spots on the base of the wings. They migrate from North Africa and southern Europe arriving in May and June. They can be seen flying until November. Buddleias, flowering Ivy and rotting fruit are their favourite foods. The caterpillars live mainly on nettles and create small tents which they use to cover themselves while they pupate into adults.







# ALDER

Alder is a distinctive plant being the only native deciduous tree to produce seed cases in the form of cones. The seeds provide winter food for birds such as Siskin which have especially small pointed beaks to break open the seed cones. The branches have a purple tinge which makes the tree colourful in winter when the leaves have fallen. Charcoal made from alder wood used to be used in gun powder.

# SAND MARTIN

At first these birds look like House Martins. But if you spend a little time watching them you will see they are smaller and while House Martins are a bluish-black Sand Martins are dark brown. They also have a 'chin strap'. Sand Martins nest in colonies in soft cliffs. They excavate holes in the cliff/river bank. Occasionally they will nest in artificial holes such as drainpipes. The sandy river banks in the St. Fagan's area make ideal nesting sites. They can be seen along the river from March to September when they fly to Africa for the winter.







# BLUEBELLS

Bluebells can be seen in the spring carpeting the ground under the Beech woodlands. Emerging early in the year allows the plants to take advantage of the light reaching the ground while the trees have no leaves. This is why there is often a spectacular display of spring wild flowers in woodlands. However, our native Bluebells are under threat from the Spanish Bluebell which was introduced to gardens in the 17th Century and now cross-breeds with the native species.

# MALLARD

Mallards are our most familiar duck. They can be seen on any part of the river. The handsome males have a dark green head and purple-brown breast feathers. The female is duller by comparison but has a beautiful brown mottled pattern. Mallards eat seeds, acorns, berries, plants, insects, amphibians and shellfish.







# BRAMBLE

Bramble (blackberry bush) has white or pink flowers from May to November and fruits in August. The leaves and flowers are a particularly important food source for butterflies, moths and their caterpillars. The berries are eaten by birds, mammals, insects and people.



# OLD-MAN'S BEARD/ TRAVELLER'S JOY

This characteristic plant can be seen at its best in the late autumn when the fluffy seed-heads are out. It is a food plant for a number of moths, bees and hoverflies. Birds and small mammals use the fluffy seed-heads as a nesting material.





# DIPPER

The Dipper is a characteristic bird of British waterways. It looks like a small, dumpy, brown blackbird with a white chest. It has a distinctive 'bobbing' habit and obvious white eyelids when it blinks. They look for food by walking under water. They feed on insect larvae and freshwater shrimps. They build domed nests on ledges especially under bridges or among tree roots.





# COMMON SPOTTED ORCHID

This is the most widespread and common of the British orchids. They can be seen on the embankment of the A4232 in the Penarth Road to Leckwith section of the Ely Trail. They are suited to this area because the materials used to create the embankment are chalk/limestone based. The plants can be identified by the elongated dark spots on the leaves. The flowers are usually dark to light pink with a spot and line pattern on the lip but the colour can vary. The flowers are out from June to early August.







# GREAT CRESTED NEWT

The Great Crested Newt is the largest of three species of newt found in the UK. They grow to around 15cm. In the breeding season the males have a magnificent crest which runs along their back. The adults are dark with warty skin. Both males and females have colourful orange bellies with black spots. Although they lay their eggs and the young develop in ponds, they spend most of the year in damp places on land such as under logs. Females lay up to 300 eggs over several weeks between April and June.





# REEDBEDS

Reeds are very good at mopping up nutrients from the water and so have been used to purify domestic sewage in some parts of Britain. Reedbeds also protect lake shores and river beds from erosion and are an important habitat for wildlife.



# KINGFISHER

This well known bird is usually heard before it is seen. The call is a shrill 'chreee'. These striking birds are about the size of a sparrow with electric blue upperparts and orange underparts; they are usually seen as a blue/orange streak as they fly swiftly along the river. Kingfishers nest in tunnels in river banks. They eat fish and aquatic insects. If you are lucky you may see one fishing from a perch.







# MONK'S- HOOD

This attractive plant is a feature of the River Ely Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) as this is the stronghold of the species in the UK. It grows to just over 1 meter in height and has lobed purple flowers which form the shape of a hood. It is found on riverside banks in shaded locations and flowers from May to September. The plant is highly poisonous and even contact with the skin can cause severe irritation. It is best to avoid all contact.



# GREY WAGTAIL

A similar size to the more familiar Pied Wagtail, the Grey Wagtail can be identified by its blue-grey upperparts and white stripe over the eye. The males have a black throat patch and lemon yellow breast, while the females have a white throat and breast. They feed on insects and other invertebrates which are often snatched from the air. They almost constantly wag their long tail when standing and can often be seen doing this on rocks in the river.







# HIMALAYAN BALSAM

(Or Indian Balsam) - A relative of the Busy Lizzie, this plant was introduced to Britain in 1839. After escaping from gardens the plant was able to quickly colonise riverbanks because its seeds land in the water and are washed downstream. It is now a widespread invasive species, it easily out competes native plants and is very difficult to remove. The flowers are a variable pinkish-purple colour and can be seen from June to October. These are followed by seed pods which open explosively at the slightest touch when ripe. The segments curl back on themselves and project the seeds into the air up to 7 meters.



# OTTER

Otters are shy, nocturnal mammals, but with luck you may see one swimming in the river or walking along the river bank. Their diet is chiefly fish but also includes birds, small mammals, amphibians, crustaceans (shell fish) and molluscs. Otters have very large territories, sometimes up to 40 km along a river. They rest and breed in underground 'holts' or in dense riverbank vegetation. You are more likely to see a 'spraint' than an Otter. These are droppings which are usually deposited in an obvious place such as on a large boulder in the water.





# GREY HERON

This large bird can sometimes be seen stalking fish close to the riverbank and in shallow water. They also eat small mammals, birds, amphibians and insect larvae. Grey Herons have a wingspan of 175-195cm and can live for up to 25 years. They nest in trees, in colonies called heronries.





# BUZZARD

Buzzards are the largest birds of prey in the area and can be found all along the Ely Trail. They have brown upperparts and white and brown pattern on their underside which varies between individuals. They nest in the woodlands and can often be seen circling on thermal currents hunting for prey. They eat small mammals such as voles and rabbits, birds, insects, earthworms and carrion.







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