

AUTUMN

Explorer's Trail



Welcome to Watchtree Nature Reserve's nature trails.
On the Explorer's Trail, you'll discover Watchtree's wide range of habitats and have the chance to see for yourself the birds, plants, mammals and insects that live here.

the PLAQUES

Have fun taking rubbings from the decorative plaques located on 9 of the waymarkers. Paper and crayons are available from the Visitor Centre. When you've identified each motif, put its initial letter in the grid on your paper, then unscramble all 9 letters to find the hidden word.

follow WAYMARKERS with a CROW symbol



the ROUTE

Total circuit is 3624m (2.25 miles) long, including an optional detour through Pow Wood.

the PATHS

All are suitable for wheelchairs and buggies.

the CLUES

1. These dark purple berries can be made into a drink.
2. There's one at the entrance and you may see a real one if you're quiet!
3. They grow in a bed, but are never asleep!
4. He may live in a Hall, but more likely under a stone.
5. This bird is said to get its name from its plaintive call.
6. They use their strong beak to make holes in trees and telegraph poles
7. This tree thrives in wet ground
8. In spring, there are thousands of these in the pond.
9. They're sometimes made of chocolate – but not at Watchtree!

Autumn is a season of many transitions. Trees and other plants bear their fruit and change colour; some birds leave, others arrive; mammals, amphibians and insects prepare for winter; temperatures fall and day-length shortens.

down the RUNWAY

After the grass alongside the runway has been cut and removed in summer, the area is grazed by sheep and cattle. Autumn is a good time to see Brown Hares in this area.



in the HEDGEROWS

As flowers and grasses die back and leaves change colour and fall, berries become more visible. Red hips and haws and blue-black sloes are a vital food source for birds and small mammals. Linnets and Yellowhammers love the seeds of the Common Thistle.



Hawthorn berries



among the REEDS

The summer green of the reedbeds changes to autumn brown as the seed-heads ripen and the leaves age. The Sedge Warbler flies off to spend winter in sub-Saharan Africa but the Reed Bunting stays on.



Mute Swan

in and around the WATER

Large numbers of Gulls - Black-headed, Common, Lesser Black-backed and Herring - can be seen on and over the lakes in autumn. Other wetland birds - Moorhens, Coots, Tufted Ducks and Mallards - can also be seen. Summer's visitors - Swallows and House Martins - migrate south from September onwards.

Tufted Duck



through the WOODS

Woods are magical places in autumn. The mixture of Birch, Scots Pine and Larch in Pow Wood glows with colour - especially if you look from the shelter - and you may catch sight of Redpoll feeding on Alder cones in Pond Wood. Look out for fungi, too, and see if you can identify the different species of trees from their fallen leaves.

Larch



Mallard

in the POND

Most of summer's insects will have disappeared by October, but waterfowl are still present and you may see or hear Teal, Mallard and Moorhen on the pond, or in the rushes and sedges at the water's edge.

what other wildlife did YOU SEE or HEAR?

in the MEADOWS

Knapweed



Small numbers of sheep and cattle are allowed to graze the meadows in autumn. The feet of the animals, especially the cattle, trample the seeds into the ground, where they will germinate the following spring. You may see flocks of Fieldfare, Redwing or Stock Dove here.

Brambles



Scots Pine



on the HOME STRAIGHT

Brambles at the side of the perimeter track provide food for birds, mice and humans! At the entrance to the Reserve, English Ash and Scots Pine represent the original 'watch trees', and an oak was planted in 2011 to mark the 10th anniversary of the Foot and Mouth epidemic which gave rise to the creation of the Reserve.