

# Wildlife Walk – 2 miles

## Ashridge Estate

THE NATIONAL TRUST

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On the main ridge of the magnificent Chiltern Hills, there are over 2000 hectares of open countryside, chalk downland and woodland to explore and escape to at Ashridge. This range of habitats means there's plenty of wildlife (the estate is renowned for butterflies and wildflowers). Bluebell displays in spring are superb and you can find lots of grassland flowers like orchids. Autumn is a great time to watch deer rut and enjoy the golden hues.

### Getting there



**Bike:** traffic-free and signed cycle route to within 1 ml of the estate. See [www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk)

**Buses:** for Monument: no.30/31 from Tring  (alight Aldbury) stops within ½ ml of the estate.

For Beacon: no.61 Aylesbury-Luton (passes close to Aylesbury and Luton 

Chiltern Rambler 327 from Tring to Monument or Beacon (Sundays, May-Sept)

**Foot:** 2¾ ml off The Ridgeway on property

**Rail:** Tring  is 1¾ ml from Monument, and Cheddington  is 3½ ml from Beacon

**Road:** between Berkhamsted and Northchurch, and Ringshall and Dagnall, just off the B4506

**Map & grid ref:** OS Explorer 181: SP970130 (Ashridge Visitor Centre) **Postcode:** HP4 1LX

### Facilities and contact

Free parking 50m away, visitor centre, tea room, NT Gift Shop, WC (not always available), baby changing facilities, short stretch of cycle path, 9 ml on a bridleway. Self-guided walks available. Tel: 01442 851227; [ashridge@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto:ashridge@nationaltrust.org.uk)

### Points of interest

- **Birds:** a large variety of woodland birds can be found including woodpeckers, nuthatch and woodcock. Buzzards are frequently seen and red kite sightings are on the increase.
- **Animals:** see fallow and muntjac deer. Edible dormouse (recognised by its grey fur and bushy tail) are found almost exclusively in the Chilterns and inhabit deciduous woodland on the estate. They nest in lofts, tree holes and even bird boxes where they spend the daylight hours.
- **Insects:** attracted by the flowers, dead wood and beech pollards, Ashridge is a great place for invertebrates including beetles and butterflies like the marbled white, speckled wood, ringlet, small copper and the Duke of Burgundy fritillary. Look for them in sunny spots in woodland areas. The chalkhill blue butterfly is seen over grassland in the summer. A warm, dark evening is the time to watch glow worms preying on banded sails.
- **Flora:** chalk downland is great for wildflowers such as salad burnet (dense round head of tiny red flowers) that is associated with the Chilterns, and common spotted, bee and pyramidal orchids.
- **Woodland:** trees like beech, oak and ash, plus woodland flowers like sanicle, sweet woodruff and huge numbers of spring bluebells. In autumn, look for the large, yellow 'chicken of the woods' fungus that grows on trees, and fly agaric toadstools (red with white spots) associated

### NT places nearby

Chiltern's Gateway Centre, Pitstone Windmill, Shaw's Corner, Whipsnade Tree Cathedral, Dunstable Downs



Fallow deer have inhabited Ashridge Estate for centuries. See males locking horns, calling females and scent-marking during the autumn rut.

*NTPL/Peter Muhly*



Look for gliding red kites, easily recognised by their long deeply forked tail, angled wings and red-brown body.

[www.northernkites.org.uk](http://www.northernkites.org.uk)



Detail of sweet chestnut bark at Ashridge. The trunks are spectacular – wide for their height and with deep fissures that spiral round the tree. The sweet chestnut was probably introduced by the Romans.

*NTPL/Paul Wakefield*

**'You will see many fine trees on this walk including beech, oak and sycamores that have self set. It's hard to imagine that before the storm of 1990 this would have been a dark area dominated by beech'**

*Bob Davis, Forester-in-charge at Ashridge*

## Distance, terrain and accessibility

2 ml (3 km) signposted route, perfect for families. The walk is linear, so you can return at any point. Level surfaces are good for pushchairs and wheelchairs. Maps of accessible routes available. The visitor centre is wheelchair-accessible with an adapted WC.

## Route and directions

1. Start at the Ashridge Visitor Centre, near the Bridgewater Monument. Cross the Green taking the path leading off the main track (it has studposts at the entrance).
2. Enter the ancient woodland. In late summer, note that lots of the sycamores along the path have tar spot fungus (black marks) – a good indicator of unpolluted air. Also look for butterflies in sunny openings and signs of badgers. Their tracks are seen in many places as well as holes called 'dung-pits' or 'badger's latrines'.
3. Go over a bridge and you are now on an ancient Drover's path, which was worn away into a ditch by villagers taking their animals to graze on Pitstone Common. Continue to Moneybury Hill, so-called because of the buried coins found here (it is prohibited to use metal detectors on National Trust land!).
4. Pass the left-hand mound, called Bell Barrow (due to its shape). It is thought to be a Bronze Age burial mound. The wooden lodge on the left is a copy of a Victorian shooting lodge that burned down in 1989.
5. On the right is a huge giant's bench with lovely views of Pitstone Hill and Aldbury Nowers. Continuing along, note the hazel trees that have been coppiced (cut at the ground, then left to grow) to provide a wildlife habitat. The fallen cedar is still alive and growing. As you walk through the pine woodland between here and point 6, enjoy the smell of the conifers!
6. Emerge from the pine trees onto Clipper Down.
7. Either turn around (this is also the turning point for mobility vehicles) and return by the same route, or continue for another mile to Ivinghoe Beacon for more wonderful views.

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Find out more at [www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk)

