

# Wildlife Walk – 2¾ miles

# Wicken Fen, Cambridgeshire



This easy trail explores a fragment of the wilderness that once covered East Anglia. Only 0.1% of Britain's fenland remains undrained. Wicken Fen is the most accessible remnant of this habitat. It is the National Trust's oldest nature reserve and home to many plants and insects, plus rare birds like bittern, and mammals, like otter.

**Start...** Wicken Fen National Trust Visitor Centre – OS Landranger 154 – grid ref: TL563705

## How to get here and local facilities

**Bike:** National Cycle Network route 11 passes the reserve boundary: [www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk)

**Bus:** no.12 from Cambridge-Ely (alight Soham High St, then 3 miles on footpaths to Wicken)

**Rail:** Ely  (9 miles from Wicken Fen)

**Road:** Wicken Fen is 17 miles NE of Cambridge and 3 miles W of Soham, just off A1123

Visitor centre, café, shop, picnic area, parking on Lode Lane (free for NT members), toilets, education room, children's quiz/trail. Trail guide leaflet available.

## Things to look out for...

A habitat of ponds, reeds, grasses, wetland trees, marshy fields and raised dykes.

### Birds

In winter, spot wildfowl and wading birds in marshy areas, plus flocks of fieldfare and redwing on farmland. Lapwing, redshank, wigeon, bearded tit, heron and marsh harrier live here year round. Woodpecker nest in birch trees and barn owls hunt over the fen and grasslands. In spring, listen out for the loud 'boom' of the highly secretive bittern. They faced extinction in the UK in the 1990s but are now on the up, thanks to conservation efforts.

### Insects

Over 4000 species are found at Wicken Fen including Britain's largest dragonfly, the emperor. Rafts of whirligig beetles skim over the surface of the ditches.

### Plants

See fenland plants like great fen sedge, hemp agrimony, meadowsweet, marsh pennywort, and the beautiful purple marsh pea. The ponds and ditches are home to yellow flag iris and greater bladderwort – a carnivorous plant that feeds on water fleas.

### Fish

Rudd, roach and perch can be seen in the clear waters of Wicken Lode.



We use Konik ponies (left) and cattle to graze the scrub, preventing the formation of woodland on the fen and the loss of this unique wetland habitat. Roe and muntjac deer, hares, grass snakes, water voles and common lizards can also be spotted at Wicken.

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Most of East Anglia's fens have been drained for farmland. In 1899 the Trust bought its first piece of land here for £10. Now, we are leading the 'Wicken Vision', an ambitious habitat creation project, which plans to extend these historic wetlands by 1000% over the next 100-years!



With a life span of just under a year, Brimstone are some of the longest-living British butterflies. It is said that Charles Darwin collected bugs here in the 1820s – he certainly rummaged through boats of sedge harvested in the fens as they arrived in Cambridge.

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**'Hardly any of Britain's ancient 'wild' fens survive, so this is a very special place for wildlife, with an amazing list of rare species'**

Stuart Warrington, NT Nature Conservation Adviser, east of England

## Route and directions...

1. Take a look in the Visitor Centre to find out more about the wildlife and history of Wicken Fen. As you exit, Wicken Lode is on your right. Follow the path keeping the water to your right. You will pass some ash trees and Wicken's Poor Fen on your left. This is common land. Traditionally local villagers had the right to collect sedge and peat from here.
2. Cross Monk's Lode at Norman's Bridge. Look out for plants like arrowhead and water lilies. Turn left after the bridge.
3. Walk along Monk's Lode, then turn right through the lower set of gates.
4. Note the two hides on your right. Look out for birds like wigeon, teal and shoveler in winter and lapwing and redshank in summer on the flooded fields; and for Konik ponies and highland cattle.
5. Turn right along the next path and on your right is the site of Norman's Mill, originally used to drain the turf (peat) pits. The windpump (see middle picture) is now restored on Sedge Fen. On your left, roe deer can often be spotted. This land was cultivated in the WW2 'Dig for Victory' campaign, but is now being restored.
6. Note the reedbeds on your left and the many birds and insects inhabiting them. Turn right again to walk alongside Wicken Lode. There is a squeeze gap and path on the right leading to West Mere Hide, used to overlook the mere's west end and the island.
7. Continue on to a hide which has views across the whole mere.
8. Cross back over Norman's Bridge and return towards the Visitor Centre.

## Terrain and accessibility

Adventurers' Trail: 2¾ miles (4½ km). A well-signed route along wide grassy paths (can be muddy). There are many other routes at Wicken Fen, including a Boardwalk Trail, accessible for wheelchairs, year round. See leaflet in visitor centre. Take care near waterways and ponds.



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