



Accessibility Guide for RSPB Swell Wood

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<https://www.rspb.org.uk/days-out/reserves/swell-wood>

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Welcome

The ancient oaks of Swell Wood are part of a continuous strip of woodland extending some 10 miles (15 km) along the ridge from Langport to the Blackdown Hills.

Between March and June nesting Herons and Little Egrets provide our largest wildlife spectacle. Spring brings a carpet of Bluebells to the woodland and in the autumn with the right conditions it is possible to see a fantastic fungi display. While throughout the year woodland birds such as Nuthatches, woodpeckers and

Treecreepers can be seen feeding at the bird feeders in the car park.

There are no toilet or refreshment facilities available at the reserve. This reserve is unstaffed.

At a Glance

Level Access

- There is level access from the main entrance to:
 - The Heronry Hide
- There is level access from the car park to:
 - Picnic Area

Visual

- Some parts of the venue have low lighting.

Getting here

RSPB Swell Wood

A378

Fivehead, Taunton

TA3 6PX

Travel by public transport

- You can get to RSPB Swell Wood by bus.
- First Group Somerset & Avon/54 bus stops on the A378 at Swell, where the reserve can be accessed via a stile onto the Scarp Trail. The bus stop is 0.0 miles / 0.0 km from RSPB Swell Wood.

- If a flat walkway is essential, a request stop may be possible at the brown reserve sign. The reserve entrance is a short distance down the side road.

Parking

- We have a car park. There are accessible parking spaces. The parking is less than 50 metres from the main entrance. Parking is free.
- While there is not a formal drop off point some of the car parking spaces can act as such. From the car park to the entrance, there is level access. The path is sloped.
- The route is 1500mm wide, or more.
- The main car park is small with a larger extension attached at the back. Some of the trails/paths start directly from the car park.

There are 25 spaces and one marked disabled space in the car park. The disabled space is 190 cm wide.

There are gates on the car park extension and they may be closed at times reducing the number of spaces available.

There is one bike rack in the car park.

There is a 2 metre height barrier at the entrance of the car park.



Main car park with hard standing, compact gravel surface. Dappled light and overhanging trees



Photo of disabled parking space. Loose leaf litter over a compact dirt and gravel surface. The space is 190 cm wide.



Car park rear extension. Loose and uneven gravel surface.



Bike rack in car park at the start of the Woodland Trail.



2-meter height barrier at entrance of car park. Barrier is open in photo but may be closed at time of visit.

Arrival

Path to main entrance

- From the street to the main entrance, there is level access.
- The path is 1200mm wide, or more.
- The path is sloped.

Main entrance

- The main entrance has level access.
- For the purpose of this guide. The main entrance is the path from the car park to the entrance of the Heronry Hide. It is a flat, compact dirt and gravel path with raised wooden edges. In places there is small loose surface gravel. This path is surrounded by trees and there can be leaf litter

or twigs on the path. There can be vegetation overhanging this path.



Path to the Hide. Flat, hard standing. Loose small gravel surface. Raised edges both sides with some overhanging vegetation.



Path to the Heronry hide. Raised edges on both sides and a fence on the left. Some overhanging vegetation.



Heronry Hide. A wooden structure with a natural roof. There is a wattle and daub heron mural at the entrance.

Getting around inside

Visual Impairment - General Information

- Some parts of the venue have low lighting.



Dappled light in woodland on the path to the Heronry Hide. Flat hard standing path through the woodland with a loose surface.

The Heronry Hide

- From the main entrance to this area, there is level access. The route is 1200mm wide, or more.
- The door is 1050mm wide.
- The path from the car park to the entrance to the Heronry Hide is a flat compact dirt and gravel path through the woodland with a loose gravel surface. The light is dappled and there can be overhanging vegetation.

The Hide is covered and sheltered from the elements fully on three sides. The front is largely open to the elements for an excellent view of the woodland. There is no glass in the hide.

Inside the Hide the front is lowered on the right-hand side to create a viewing area for wheelchair and mobility scooter users. The top of this shelf is 60 cm high from the ground. Other shelves in the hide are 80 cm high from the ground.

There are three wooden benches in the hide. All of the benches have backs but no arms. The long bench at the rear of the hide has an angled back to increase ease and comfort of viewing nesting herons in the treetops. There is a gap of 67 cm between the rows of benches.

Bird song and other woodland sounds such as rustling leaves can be heard from the hide. On occasion traffic can also be heard driving by on the nearby main road.

There is one bench on the path to the hide. It is at the start of the trail just off the car park. This is a wooden bench with a back but no arms.



Outside of the Heronry Hide showing flat hard standing path to entrance.



Entrance to Heronry Hide.



View from entrance of Heronry Hide. Also showing lowered viewing area for wheelchair or mobility scooter users.



Three wooden benches. Back on one bench is angled to improve comfort when watching the treetops. No arms on the benches.



The hide provides shelter on three sides and is open at the front.



Wooden bench with a back and no arms at the start of the path to the Heronry Hide.

Getting around outside

 *Designated Walking Trail*

Woodland Trail - circular route

- The trail is 900metres long. Some of the trail has a loose surface. There are exposed tree roots and an uneven, undulating, compact dirt surface to the

trail. After wet weather the trail can be muddy in places. Only part of the trail is suitable for wheels - this is marked by signage. The trail is sloped. The trail has seats.

- The Woodland Trail is a circular route through the woodland from the car park. The path through the woodland is a compact dirt path with a loose surface - mostly small stones, leaves, twigs and other general woodland debris. Parts of the path is edged with low wooden board up to the picnic area, after the picnic area there is no wooden edging. The path from the car park to the picnic area is suitable for wheels. There are two covered metal drainage channels on this part of the path. There are no designated passing places. The trail is 110 cm wide at its narrowest to the picnic area, after the picnic area the trail is 100 cm wide at its narrowest. There is overhanging vegetation in places and dappled light conditions throughout the trail. After wet weather conditions the path can be muddy and slippery, and holes can appear in the path surface. There are both downward and upward sloping gradients to the path. Raised tree roots cross the path in places. There are piled fallen logs off to

the sides of the path (not on the path).

After the picnic area there are two wooden benches along the woodland trail. These benches do not have backs or arms. The benches are not evenly spaced.

There is a bug hotel in an open area on the other side of the trail near the picnic area. There are loose materials inside of the bug hotel. There are raised tree stumps and uneven ground in the area where the bug hotel has been built.

The sounds heard in this area are mostly bird song and other woodland sounds.

Only assistance dogs are permitted on the Woodland Trail.



Signage showing route suitable for wheels at start of Woodland Trail



Compact dirt surface with loose surface path of
Woodland Trail



Wood pile off of side of path of Woodland Trail



Tree growing on the side of the Woodland Trail
between car park and picnic area (on wheel accessible
route)



Bug Hotel to side Woodland Trail near picnic area



Part of the Woodland Trail path after the picnic area. Showing the sloping gradient and the loose surface litter.



Example of raised tree roots across Woodland Trail path after picnic area



One of the two wooden benches on the Woodland Trail. Bench has no back or arms.

 *Designated Walking Trail*

Scarp Trail

- The trail is 1800metres long. Some of the trail has a loose surface. Obstacles along the trail include sharp inclines, narrow paths, uneven surfaces, steep steps, mud, over hanging branches and tree roots. The trail is sloped. The trail has seats.
- The Scarp Trail runs through the sloping woodland on the opposite side of the road from the RSPB Swell Wood car park. The Scarp Trail has almost 400 steps (at our count across the whole trail), runs up and down the side of the hill, and is unsuitable for wheels. The trail is an uneven, compact dirt path with loose surface litter and is very steep in places. There can be encroaching vegetation

hanging over or growing at the sides of the path. At its narrowest the path is 40 cm with sloping drops from the side of the path. After wet weather the path can be very muddy. There are piles of fallen logs on the side of the path in places.

To access the Scarp Trail from the Swell Wood car park there is a wooden bridge with a railing on one side. On the other side there is a drop of 80 cm's into a ditch. The bridge is 60 cm wide. This bridge brings you to the road you turned off of into the car park and this needs to be crossed. A little ways up the road on the opposite side a steep wooden staircase needs to be climbed to access the Scarp Trail. The staircase has 22 steps and handrails on one side (Left going up and right coming down).

Many of the steps can be avoided by not walking the trail as a loop but as a there and back following the trail to where there is stile access from the bus stop on the main road. The majority (but not all) of the steps are on the loop part of the trail up and down the side of the hill in the woodland.

The ground slopes away steeply from parts of the trail. Some of these areas have post and rail barriers along the side and others do not have any

kind of barrier.

There are two wooden benches on the Scarp Trail.

They do not have backs or arms.

There are no passing places on the Scarp Trail.

There are stinging nettles and brambles growing in some areas alongside the Scarp Trail path. Some fences and hedges have barbed wire used as part of their construction.

Sounds heard in this area are mostly bird song and other woodland noises. Traffic noises can be heard when walking on the path where it runs parallel with the Main Road. At the bottom of the trail noises from farming machinery can be heard when it is in use in the fields.

Dogs on short leads are permitted on the Scarp Trail.

Access to the far end of the trail can be obtained via a bus stop along the A379.



Access to the Scarp Trail from the car park.



Steps on path to Scarp Trail from car park. Vegetation encroaching along path edges.



Trees growing over the steps in the path to the Scarp Trail in some places. The clearance under the tree pictured is 140 cm's.



Compact dirt path surface and tree roots across Scarp Trail



Tree roots across Scarp Trail



Part of long staircase of steps on Scarp Trail



Narrow part of the Scarp Trail with wooden edging on sides of path



Wooden bench with no back or arms on Scarp Trail



Another staircase on the Scarp Trail



Stile access from bus stop on main road



A further set of steps on the Scarp Trail



Bridge on Scarp Trail to road crossing.



Steep wooden steps near beginning of Scarp Trail after crossing road

 *Designated Walking Trail*

Meadow Trail

- The trail is 1650metres long. Some of the trail has a loose surface. Obstacles along the trail include exposed tree roots and stumps, sharp inclines, narrow paths, uneven surfaces, mud, over hanging branches and tree roots. There may be occasions

where trees have fallen across the path and not been cleared yet. The trail is sloped.

- The Meadow Trail is a there and back trail running down the steep wooded hillside from the Woodland Trail to Fivehead Meadow. A circular route of about 2 miles can be created by using the network of public footpaths to return to Swell Wood Car Park. Fivehead Meadow is at its best during June and July when the meadow is awash with plants and alive with the humming and buzzing of insect life.

The Meadow Trail path is a undulating, compact soil path with a loose surface - mostly small stones, leaves, twigs and general woodland debris. When wet it can become muddy including long patches of clay like mud on steep sections of the path. This path is not suitable for wheels. It is not possible to walk side by side on much of the path. At it's narrowest the path is 30 cm wide. At it's steepest the path has a gradient of 1:3 / 33%. The path is not level and slopes away in a number of places. At its steepest this cross-gradient is 1:3/ 33%.

There are trees and branches overhanging the path. At the time of writing this guide (July 2022) the

lowest tree growing over the path had a clearance of 150 cm under it. There can be vegetation encroaching the sides of the path including nettles and brambles.

There are 7 steps on this trail. There are three bridges on this path over ditches. The first bridge at the start of the path from the Woodland Trail is 84 cm wide at its narrowest point. It has wooden edgeboards and handrails on both sides. It has a compact dirt soil surface with loose leaf litter over wooden slats. The second is 52 cm wide at the narrowest point and the third bridge is 56 cm wide at the narrowest point. There are no handrails or edgeboards. There is a drop of 50 cm below the second bridge and 70 cm below the third bridge. The bridges are wooden boards with chicken wire attached to the surface.

There are no benches on this route.

Only assistance dogs are permitted on the Meadow Trail.

Sound heard in this area are mostly bird song and other woodland noises. Traffic and farm machinery can be heard in some places along the trail.



Wooden bridge at beginning of Meadow Trail linking it to Scarp Trail. Shows compact dirt path running through woods.



Photo of path near beginning of trail. Dirt path running between large trees with plants covering the ground underneath.



Photo from top of second bridge showing second and third bridges on trail. Wooden boards over ditches surrounded by vegetation.



Photo showing view from end of third bridge looking back up towards second bridge showing four steps in-between the two.



Photo showing examples of obstacles in path. Trees growing either side, stump in centre of path and fallen log on edge.



Examples of obstacles in path. Small branch laying across path, tree stump encroaching on one side and low vegetation on both



Examples of obstacles. Narrow path with encroaching tree and roots and an overhanging tree.



Example of path surfaces. Muddy patch stretching across width with fallen sticks in.



Tree on either side of the path with raised surface roots in dirt path with loose surface litter.



Path narrowed by trees on either side of the path.



Muddy path with steep incline. Low vegetation on either side of the path.



Tree overhanging narrow dirt path. Nettles in foreground, sloping grass mound on right and trees in the background.



Dirt path with loose surface litter and muddy patches running through raised grassy banks with trees on.



Muddy path with steep incline. Vegetation on sides. Background shows where fallen tree has been cut through to reopen path.



Tree overhanging path. Raised roots in dirt path and loose surface litter.



Dirt path winding around a tree with a raised root across the path. Vegetation growing on right side of image.



Tree hanging over path (170 cm clearance underneath in 2022). Vegetation including bramble growing on both sides of dirt path.



Sign at junction turning to Fivehead Meadow at end of Meadow Trail



Wooden kissing gate into Fivehead Meadow. Vegetation growing on either side. Overhanging tree branch.



Fivehead Meadow. Field of grasses and flowers surrounded by large trees.



Entrance of junction with Meadow Trail and start of public footpath. Dirt path loose surface. Trees either side.

Picnic Area

Picnic Area

- From the car park to the picnic area, there is level access. The path is 1100mm wide, or more.
- Some tables have space for wheelchair users. You can bring your own food to the picnic area.
- The picnic area is on the side of the main Woodland Trail path. There is one picnic bench in this area. It has a wheelchair or pushchair accessible space. There is low wooden railing around the back of the picnic area where the ground slopes away from the picnic area. There is a viewpoint looking out over the moors at the picnic area.



Wooden picnic bench at end of compact dirt path with loose surface litter. Trees in the background.

Customer care support

Accessibility equipment

- Assistance dogs are able to use woodland as toilet area. Please clean up and remove dog mess. No dog mess bins are provided on site.

Customer care support

- This is an unstaffed reserve.

Guide last updated: 6 March 2024