

The hay meadow in the LNR is rich in flora including greater burnet, devil's-bit scabious and cowslips. Meadow sweet grows in damper areas providing nectar for the many insects.

Butterflies, dragonflies and grasshoppers are in abundance all through the summer. The swamp is home to nesting reed buntings, sedge warblers and grasshopper warblers. Ravens and red kites are occasionally seen and birds of prey such as the hobby, hunt bats at dusk. Foxes, badgers and hedgehogs all feed in the park at night but are rarely seen. The River Blythe SSSI runs through the park and is a corridor for wildlife including kingfishers. Otters have also been reported on the Blythe so holts (an otter's resting place) have been constructed in the park to encourage them to stay.

Millison's Wood

Location: off Albert Road, Millison's Wood (Nr Meriden)
Bus Route: 900 to Birmingham Rd/Albert Rd
Best time to visit: Spring
Designation: LNR and SINC

What you might see:

- Bluebells, greater stitchwort and wood anemone in spring
- Chiffchaff, blackcap and greater spotted woodpecker in spring and summer
- Bracket fungi on deadwood in autumn and winter

Millison's Wood is the largest woodland owned and managed by Solihull Council. It's part of the former Forest of Arden which once covered a much larger area of Warwickshire. It is ancient semi-natural woodland which means that the site has been continuously wooded in some form for at least 400 years. There is a rich ground flora with wood anemone, bugle, red campion and wood sorrel and in early to mid-May bluebells carpet the ground. Deadwood habitat supports a diverse range of fungi and hole nesting birds such as the greater spotted woodpecker. Rotational coppice management, glade clearance and birch thinning has been reinstated in the wood via a volunteer scheme, to improve habitat for butterflies like the brimstone, orange tip and speckled wood.

Blythe Valley Countryside Park

Location: Off A34 Stratford Road, M42 junc 4
Bus Route: 166* to Blythe Valley Business Park
Best time to visit: All year round
Designation: Business/Countryside Park

What you might see:

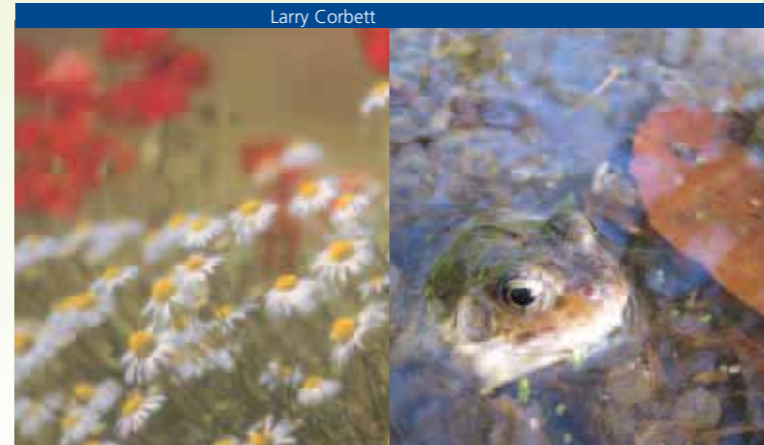
- Swans, coots, herons and moorhens all year
- Redpoll, siskin and goldfinch feeding on alders in the winter
- Bats foraging over the grassland and ponds from May to September

This flagship Business Park owned by The British Land Company PLC is a good example of where biodiversity benefits have been built into the development from the start and efforts have been made to enhance connectivity with the surrounding farmland, woods and meadows. The development incorporates 40ha of open space which has been designated as a Countryside Park.

Boardwalks and a nature trail have been included as features within the Countryside Park. There is a wide range of both existing and created habitats including wildflower grassland, woodland, streams, hedgerows and open water with reedbeds. Newly planted wood consists of oak, ash and small leaved lime, in keeping with the Arden Landscape character. Skylark nesting plots have been created to encourage this local Biodiversity Action Plan species to breed.

The Park includes one of the largest and earliest SUDS (Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems) in England, which controls surface water flow with ponds and reedbeds and protects the River Blythe. The creation of the SUDS has allowed a variety of different animal and plant habitats to be created ranging from damp willow woodland through tall reed beds and wet grassland.

www.blythevalleypark.com



Larry Corbett

How you can do your bit?

- Plant nectar rich flowers to attract a wide range of insects, including bees, hoverflies and butterflies
- Grow holly, cotoneaster, pyracantha, guelder rose and blackthorn to provide berries for birds and small mammals
- Grow climbers against walls, boundary fences and through trees to provide cover and food for birds and mammals
- Have a go at growing your own organic fruit and vegetables. It's great exercise and nothing beats the fresh taste. You will also know your food is pesticide free and locally grown
- Water is a precious resource so collect rainwater to use in the garden and reduce the need for watering by improving the soil and by selecting appropriate plants
- Avoid using pesticides and herbicides – use biological control instead.
- Make compost and leaf mould instead of buying peat-based composts. Not only is this a cheap way to feed the soil but is also a great way of recycling waste
- Stop the spread of invasive aquatic plants which can do immense damage when they are released into the wild. Dispose of parrots feather, floating pennywort, Australian swamp stonecrop, water fern and water primrose by burying, composting or burning. Better still; don't buy them in the first place. Buy a native pond oxygenator instead such as hornwort or water milfoil

Where you can find out more information

Visit Solihull Council's web site www.solihull.gov.uk for more information on biodiversity and other sites of interest to visit plus conservation volunteering opportunities

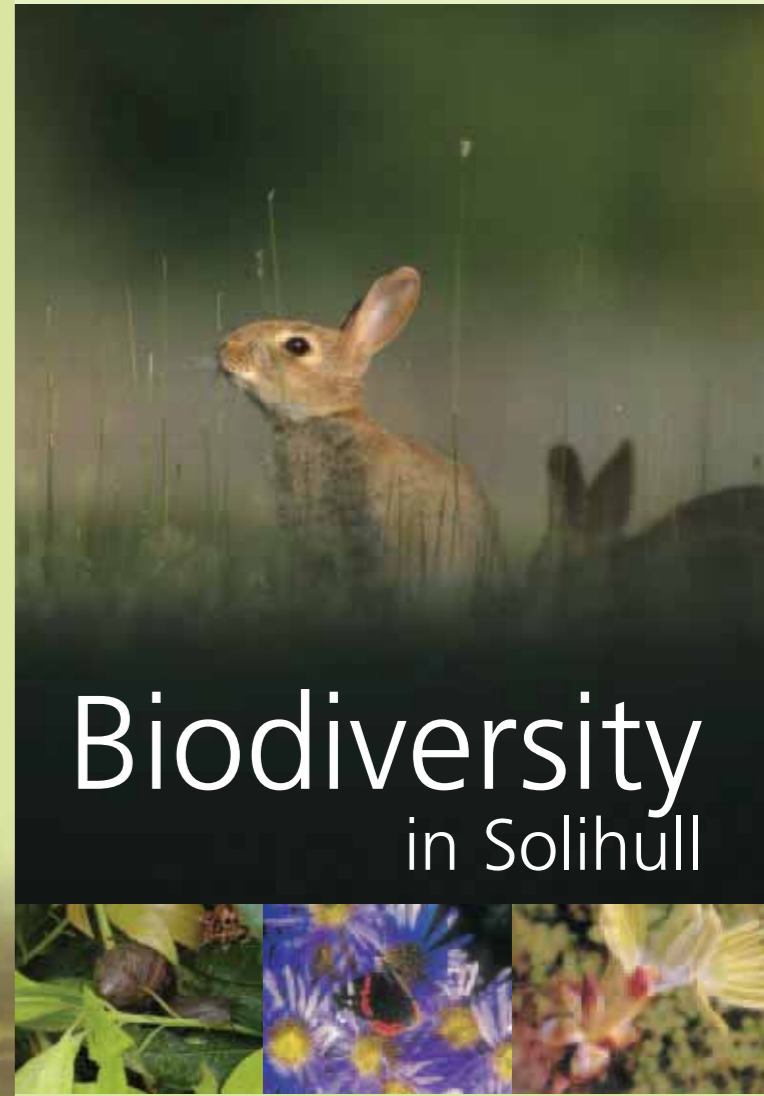
- www.wildlifetrusts.org
- www.organicgardening.org.uk
- www.floralocale.org
- www.plantlife.org.uk
- www.travelwm.co.uk

Pictures on front cover, winners of Solihull in Bloom photo competition

Larry Corbett - rabbit
Helen Edkins - Butterfly
Dennis Ayres - Horse Chestnut
Max Walker – snail



July '06



Biodiversity in Solihull

An explanation of biodiversity and a set of local sites to visit and explore

Sponsored by

 Blythe Valley Park

What is biodiversity?

The term 'biodiversity' comes from the words 'biological diversity' and simply means the variety of all living things from tiny microbes to the largest mammals and trees. It also refers to the woodlands, wetlands and other habitats that support these species.

Why conserve biodiversity?

Human life depends upon healthy functioning ecosystems and the biodiversity that they contain. Biodiversity gives us many of the essentials of life – water, cleaner air, food, clothing and medicines. Nature also greatly enriches our lives – it's our life-support system. Biodiversity is under threat from a global scale right down to a local level. Threats include inappropriate land management, pollution and habitat destruction. We need to take action now if we are to secure a healthy planet (and Borough) for the future.

Biodiversity in Solihull

Solihull is rich in biodiversity with bluebell woods such as Millison's Wood and Yorks Wood, remnant heathland around Bickenhill and ancient Arden pastures criss-crossed with hedgerows. There are five Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in the Borough, 11 Local Nature Reserves and more than 250 locally important wildlife sites. But biodiversity is not only to be found in designated sites. With the pressures of intensive agriculture taking its toll on farmland and woodland biodiversity and new demand for housing and business developments, Solihull's parks, gardens, veteran trees and open spaces provide a lifeline for wildlife that would otherwise be squeezed out. Green corridors such as the rivers Cole and Blythe as well as canals enable wildlife to move across the Borough and provide important areas for recreation.

We have highlighted a few sites which you can explore in more detail for yourself, with lots more information available on our web site www.solihull.gov.uk.

Designation of sites:

Local Nature Reserve (LNR)

Proposed LNR (PLNR)

Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC)

Bus information provided by Travel West Midlands.

Buses marked with an asterisk (*) do not run on Sundays.

The Cole Valley

Location: Car parks at Fordbridge Road, Cooks Lane, Meriden Park (Moorend Avenue) and Partridge Close

Bus routes: **55** & **71*** to Fordbridge Road **94** to Cooks Lane **55**, **966*** & **966A** to Moorend Avenue/Meriden Park

97A to Yorkminster Drive/Partridge Close

Best time to visit: All year

Designation: LNR and partial SINC

What you might see:

- Bluebells and wild garlic (Ramsons) in Yorks Wood in early May
- Kingfishers along the river all year
- Bats especially foraging over Babbs Mill Lake from May to September

Connecting North Warwickshire to Eastern Birmingham, the Cole Valley meanders through the North of Solihull. The river corridor includes Babbs Mill Park Lake and Cole Bank PLNR, with valuable links to Yorks Wood, Alcott Wood and Smiths Wood LNRs.

There are a wide variety of habitats along the Valley from Babbs Mill Lake which was dug as a flood water management system in the 1960s, to wet grasslands at Cole Bank Park PLNR. There are areas that have been planted as small woodlands and remnant ancient hedgerows still survive in some places. Yorks Wood LNR is a superb example

of semi-natural ancient woodland and looks fantastic when the bluebells are in flower. This mixture of habitats means that there is a great abundance of wildlife including kingfishers, grey herons, sparrowhawks, foxes and bats. In the wetter areas, plants like ragged robin flourish and southern marsh orchids can be seen at Cole Bank Park.

Coldlands Wood (pLNR)

Location: Access from Buryfield Road or Naseby Road

Bus route: **41***, **42C***, **57**, **57A***, **71***, **72***, **169*** & **672*** to Lode Lane/Buryfield Road, then a 5 minute walk.

Best time to visit: Spring

Designation: proposed LNR

What you might see:

- Ancient beech trees
- Bluebells in early May
- Nuthatches sealing their nest holes with mud in spring
- Butterflies and hoverflies in summer

This 3 hectare woodland is completely surrounded by housing but is an excellent example of semi-natural ancient woodland, with good age range and structure of trees.

There are two distinct types of woodland, with the main area being dominated by oaks with hazel coppice underneath and bluebells carpeting

the floor in spring. There is a small area of beech woodland surrounded by the oak wood and the contrast is striking, especially in spring. Because of the dense canopy of the beech trees and the fact that their leaves are thick and hard, the woodland floor is virtually devoid of plant life as it is covered throughout the year. It is unusual to find very old trees in a woodland situation as most woodlands have been cleared in the past to harvest the timber, so the ancient beech trees here are of special interest.

Butterflies and hoverflies are among the more obvious insects, flying along the woodland tracks and resting in the dappled shade holding their territories. Woodland birds also hold territories, singing to announce their presence to potential rivals.

Elmdon Park

Location: Access from Tanhouse Farm Road or Damson Parkway

Bus Route: **672*** to Tanhouse Farm Rd **966*** & **966A** to Damson Ln/Land Rover

Best time to visit: Summer and Winter

Designation: LNR and partial SINC

What you might see:

- The 500 year old sweet chestnut
- Lesser-spotted woodpeckers calling from the parkland trees
- Meadows filled with butterflies in summer
- Flocks of wintering thrushes

At 77.5 hectares, Elmdon is the largest of the Council's parks. It includes formal recreation areas, a lake, smaller ponds, a brook, woodland, scrub, meadows and an old walled garden (Elmdon Manor LNR) managed by Warwickshire Wildlife Trust as a nature reserve. All three species of woodpecker are seen around

the park and buzzards regularly soar overhead. Kingfishers and terns occasionally visit the lake to feed where herons are resident.

The north east section of the park is known as Elmdon Nature Park and was arable land until 1999, when it was sown with wildflower seed and now is a mass of colour in the summer. Ox-eye daisy, knapweed and meadow vetchling all provide nectar for abundant bees and butterflies. Other areas within the park are being managed to enhance the grassland flora and a small area of wet grassland has southern marsh orchids and adder's-tongue fern.

The woodland is being managed to improve the structure and to increase the numbers of birds and invertebrates, by opening up glades and rides.

Malvern and Brueton Park

Location: New Road, Solihull or Warwick Road, Solihull

Bus Route: **4**, **40A*** & **40C*** to New Rd/Park Rd **40A*** & **40C*** to Warwick Rd/Marsh Ln

Best time to visit: All year round

Designation: LNR and partial SINC

What you might see:

- Over 80 species of birds recorded, including sedge, garden and grasshopper warblers
- Wood anemones, ramsons and bluebells in the woodland in spring
- Meadow flowers, dragonflies and butterflies in summer
- Grasshoppers singing in summer

Malvern Park, with its formal flower beds and recreational facilities complement the arboretum and Brueton Park LNR consisting of woodland, grassland and marsh. Over 54 hectares in all, within walking distance of Solihull town centre.

