



Nick Mot

Cotton Dell

Cotton Dell is one of our most peaceful, diverse and naturally beautiful reserves containing areas of wildflower grassland and ancient woodland. Our Land Management Team Co-ordinator, Jeff Sim, shares a walk around this popular wildlife haven.

Industrial revolution

Park in the Staffordshire County Council picnic area and walk over the grassy area, crossing the River Churnet by the footbridge. Oakamoor may be a peaceful sleepy village nowadays, but not so long ago the entire valley was one of the hubs of the Industrial Revolution. The area you are walking across was the site of the old copper works. The valley is rich in minerals and Oakamoor was known as 'Smoke-amoor'. Take time to read the interpretation panels to learn more about the fascinating role Staffordshire played in the Industrial Revolution. Cross the B5417 at the old lime kilns and head up the narrow track passing a few houses and garages.

Old stone bridge

Just after entering the reserve, the track crosses the Cotton Brook for the first time. Use the flight of steps on the left so you can take a look at this bridge in all its glory. The bridge is an entirely dry stone construction.

Bird song

Return to the main driveway and head up the valley. As you enter the steep-sided valley of Cotton Dell the noises

of the outside world disappear and you enter a beautiful tranquil world of bird call and rushing waters.

Help for native plants

The steep sides of the valley were, until recently, overgrown with rhododendron—an unwelcome legacy from the Victorian era. During recent years our wonderful teams of volunteers have worked hard to clear the Dell of its 'Rhody' to encourage more native trees and scrubs to re-establish, although some inaccessible plants still cling on in places.

Crayfish and caddisflies

Where the gravel track heads left up to a private house, take the earth track straight ahead. The Dell valley sides become steeper now. The waters of the Cotton Brook are very pure and are inhabited by an abundance of freshwater life including crayfish and caddisflies. Small trout can also be spotted in the water.

Spot the dipper

Whilst walking by the brook, keep an eye out for the secretive dipper. Dippers get their name by the way they dip and bob in the waters for invertebrate food.

Important deadwood

In the stream you will notice that where trees and branches have fallen in the valley floor they have deliberately been left where they fell. Deadwood in water is an important and fairly rare habitat. Certain insects specialise in deadwood in water and one of them lives here in Cotton Dell—the logjammer hoverfly, a honey bee mimic.

Woody debris is also used to protect the footpath from erosion. Further upstream the path passes close to the brook, and at times of flood it has been eroded away. The Trust has placed trees in the brook at strategic places to deflect the flow of the water from the path, as well as provide a dead wood habitat.

Wonderful wildflowers

Take the footbridge across the brook and follow the steep path of steps up the northern side of the Dell. As you leave the valley floor, pass several old beech trees and then head into a conifer plantation.

When you reach the flat track head right, and then take the small track downhill before you reach the busy Star Bank. This track takes you past a wonderful wildflower meadow (worth returning to see in June) and back to the track near the entrance of Cotton Dell.

Six to spot



Dipper

Cotton Dell is one of few places in Staffordshire where dippers are known to nest, as they rely on good quality streams that are clean enough to contain a variety of invertebrates.



Old stone bridge

At the Oakamoor entrance to the reserve, take a detour down the steps to view the old stone bridge which links back to the industrial history of the Churnet Valley.



Green Tiger Beetle

Small boggy pools provide homes to opportunistic insects, but one of the most easily identifiable is the Green Tiger Beetle which can be seen on bare sandy patches in cattle grazed pastures.



Logjammer hoverfly

The Churnet Valley is a stronghold for the logjammer hoverfly—a nationally scarce honey bee mimic. To help create a thriving population our rivers team has been placing deadwood in the stream.



Fungi

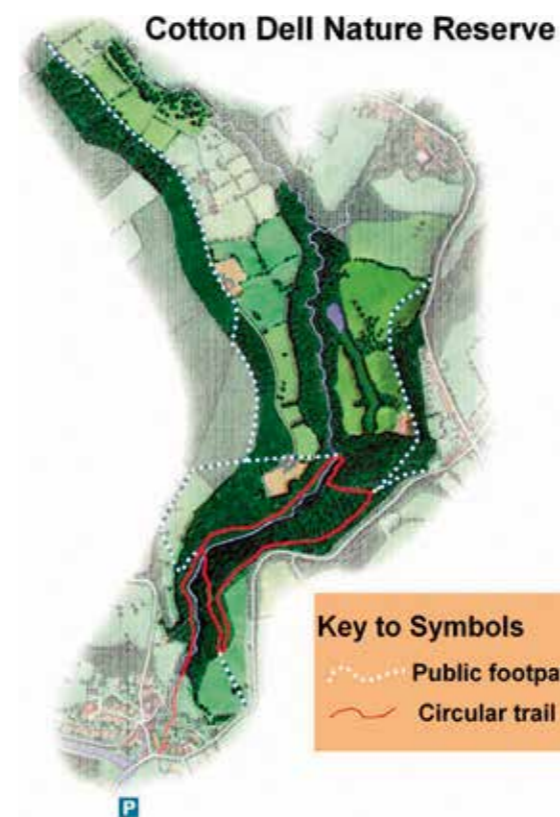
As you walk around you may notice an abundance of dead trees which allows fungi to thrive in our woodlands. Dead and dying trees are great at attracting fungi and insect life.



Oak trees

The Trust is changing the conifers to more native broadleaf trees. We have been making gaps in the conifer canopy to allow native saplings such as rowan, oak and birch to grow.

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Getting there

In Oakamoor, park at the Staffordshire County Council picnic area and walk back to the B5417. Cross the bridge and take the gravel track after the first left turn and opposite the lime kilns, passing houses and garages to reach the reserve entrance. Postcode: ST10 3AG. Grid Reference: SK052445.

Useful information

This circular walk will take you through a small part of the dell but it is well worth coming back here and exploring further in different seasons as the reserve hosts a world of wonderful woodland and grassland wildlife. The terrain is mostly firm but can be wet and muddy in some areas, especially in winter. The circular trail paths are on steep hillsides in places.