

Doxey Marshes Stafford

Doxey Marshes is a nationally important reserve for hundreds of birds. Stretching from the M6 almost right into the centre of Stafford, the Site of Special Scientific Interest follows the floodplain of the River Sow and is a mix of wet grassland, reedbed and rush pasture creating a haven for many different species of bird.

1 From the car park at the end of Wootton Drive near the M6 junction follow the path around the back of the houses away from the motorway. Stop by the pumping station for great views across the northern end of the marshes. The water in front of you is called Creswell Flash. There are four main 'flashes' on the marshes, formed by subsidence during the salt extraction in Stafford's history.

Creswell Flash is great for overwintering wildfowl. Keep an eye out for wigeon and shoveler as well as flocks of lapwing and other waders.

The islands on the far shoreline were formed recently to create extra foraging and nesting habitat for the reserve's birds. In the winter of 2016/17 we carried out major changes to the northern end of the reserve, putting

natural bends back in the artificially straightened River Sow, lowering the height of some of the areas and creating the islands you can see in front of you. The result has been a more diverse habitat and also areas which can store extra floodwater to help protect Stafford from flooding.

2 Carry on along the path and then drop down a short slope, turning right onto Warren's Lane. Carry on down this track before stopping off at the viewing platform on your left. This is Boundary Flash, and occasionally we have bittern stopping off in the reedbed to hunt during the winter months. Sadly, the reedbed isn't large enough to host a breeding pair.

One of the more unusual species found at Doxey is the elusive water rail which like hiding in the wet ditches. Listen out for their pig-like squeals!

3 Continue down Warren's Lane, through the kissing gate and turn right. Look out for reed buntings in the reedbed on your left as you follow the path as it turns and heads towards the small 'octohide'. This hide overlooks Darling Pasture, one of the most important breeding areas on the reserve for waders.

4 Continue along the path as it heads past the river. The large willow trees are some of the oldest on the reserve. They have been pollarded, a management technique which stops them becoming too large, whilst providing useful timber in the past. These old willows with their old branches, holes and deadwood provide great roosts for bats.

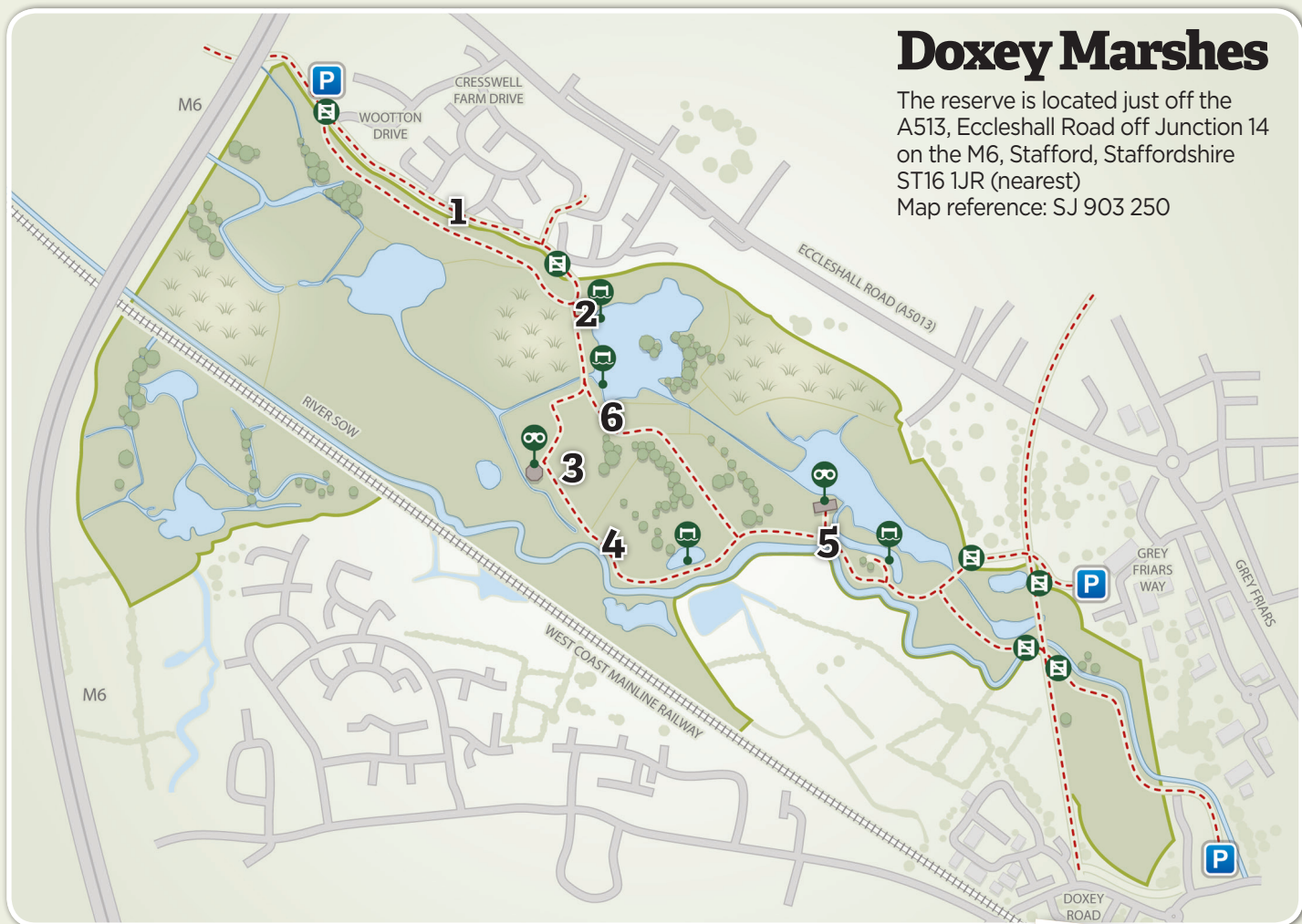
5 Follow the path as it heads along the river until you reach a kissing gate. Go through this gate to the main bird hide. This hide often offers great views. The wetland in front of you attracts many birds including the secretive snipe which winter on the reserve in their hundreds. Other species to see are lapwing, tufted duck and great crested grebe.

Leave the hide and retrace your steps along the path, but on the first corner take the path which heads off to the right up a slight hill through a hay meadow. The old hedgerow on your left is great for finches and thrushes.

6 The path brings you back to the kissing gate at Boundary Flash. Listen out for warblers in the reedbed before you head back to the car park.

Doxey Marshes

The reserve is located just off the A513, Eccleshall Road off Junction 14 on the M6, Stafford, Staffordshire ST16 1JR (nearest)
Map reference: SJ 903 250



7 to spot

1 Lapwing - A wader. Listen out for their distinctive 'Peewit' call as it tumbles from the sky.

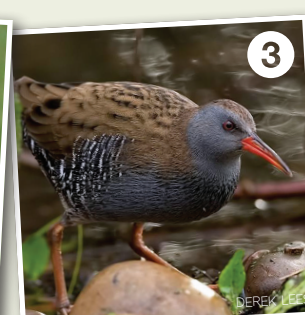
2 Snipe - A secretive and rare wetland wader. Hundreds overwinter here, though they can be hard to spot.

3 Water rail - Listen out for their pig-like squeals echoing across the reserve.

4 Warblers - Listen out for the first reed and sedge warblers as they migrate back to the reserve's breeding grounds from Africa.

5 Reed bunting - Easily missed but in plentiful supply on the reserve during winter and breeding months.

6 Otter - A success story, the otter is making a recovery across the country as water quality has improved. Otters use the reserve to hunt and are regularly spotted.



7 Pensioner pollards - The oldest trees on the reserve. We pollard our trees to stop them getting too big and collapsing. This also prolongs their life and stops them being used by predator birds spying on spring wader chicks.

