

RUXLEY GRAVEL PITS

NATURE RESERVE



yellow flag iris and dragonfly

Protecting Wildlife for the Future



blackcap

The dry land

Whereas the waterside plants have developed from the original vegetation that flanked the River Cray before the gravel working, the vegetation that has colonised the dry land is more haphazard in origin. It includes a number of exotic species that are adept at colonising disturbed ground, such as michaelmas daisy and Canadian golden-rod around the marsh, and Japanese knotweed and goat's-rue on the drier banks. Buddleia also occurs here, its flowers attracting butterflies in summer.

The various parts of the banks show all stages in the natural succession from bare ground to woodland. Annual weeds give way to grasses and other herbaceous perennials like nettles and willow-herb; these are followed by bramble and woody shrubs like hawthorn, and finally by trees such as ash and birch. These mixtures of plants provide rich feeding grounds for both seed and insect eating birds. The latter are represented especially by the summer warblers – garden warbler, blackcap, whitethroat, willow warbler and chiffchaff – as well as by robins and wrens which are present all year (as are chiffchaffs). Amongst the seed-eating birds, linnets, goldfinches, greenfinches, chaffinches, bullfinches and redpolls all nest in the scrub.

Uncommon plants on the reserve include bee and spotted orchids, crown vetch and common meadow rue.

RUXLEY GRAVEL PITS

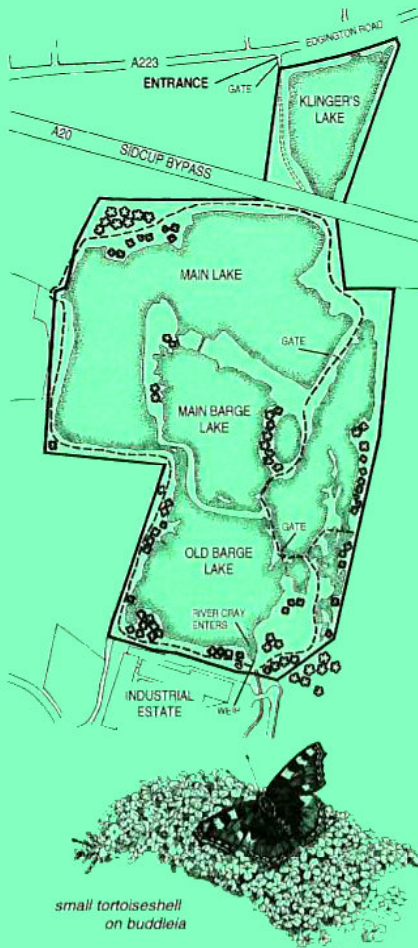
Ruxley Gravel Pits are an extremely important area for nature conservation because the relatively undisturbed waterside and marshland plant communities are unique in the south-east sector of Greater London. They are managed as a nature reserve by Kent Wildlife Trust in collaboration with the Orpington & District Angling Association and the Environment Agency. The area is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest by English Nature.

The reserve consists of a series of lakes in the Cray Valley, formed by the extraction of gravel from 1929-51. In 1947 little ringed plovers nested for the first time in Kent. Since the gravel working ceased, the banks and some marshy areas have become colonised naturally by a wide variety of waterside and marshland vegetation. As a result, there is no longer any exposed gravel for the plovers, but many other kinds of birds and other animals have been able to colonise the area.

By an agreement between English Nature and the Angling Association the banks are available for angling, but areas at the southern end are set aside primarily for nature conservation. Wherever possible, management is carried out in such a way as to accommodate both angling and wildlife conservation.



great crested grebe



small tortoiseshell on buddleia

The water

The River Cray runs through the lakes, which are normally less than four metres in depth. The Angling Association keeps the lakes stocked with fish, principally roach, bream, tench, carp, perch and pike. Many different species of water plants occur in the lakes, including the rare marestail.

Great crested and little grebes, mallard, tufted duck and kingfisher can be seen throughout the year, with the addition of pochard, teal and gadwall in winter.

The water margins and marshes

Where they are not overhung by trees, the water margins support a good growth of waterside plants. Common reed forms extensive patches in the water, while other plants occupy a narrower zone along the water's edge. Of these the most abundant are sedges, rushes, bur-reeds and the well-known reed-mace, with its spectacular flowering spikes. In some areas, especially in the south-east corner, these waterside plants cover a more extensive area of marshland, interspersed with pools.

The trees that fringe the water are mostly willow. They support a great variety of insect life – in particular, the caterpillars of many night-flying moths feed on willow. Another tree that likes its roots in water is the alder, which occurs especially in the northwest corner and in the central area.

In winter, the seed cones provide food for siskins and redpolls. Both snipe and jack snipe occur in winter. Careful watching will often reveal a water rail skulking through the vegetation.

In summer, reed and sedge warblers and reed buntings nest in the marsh.

Amongst the mammals, water voles, field voles and harvest mice all live in the marsh and its edges.



Location and access

Ruxley Gravel Pits are located in the Borough of Bromley about 13 miles from central London, south of the A223 and about a quarter of a mile west of Ruxley roundabout. Map reference: TQ 480706.

Ruxley Gravel Pits owe much of their value to the fact that they are relatively undisturbed and untrampled, in spite of their proximity to heavily populated suburbs. Access for fishing is controlled by the Orpington & District Angling Association. Access for members of Kent Wildlife Trust is by permit only, obtainable from Tyland Barn at the address below.

Parties from schools, colleges and societies, limited to 15 per party, can be given conducted tours by special arrangement.

reed warbler

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Kent Wildlife Trust

is part of a nationwide network of local Wildlife Trusts which work to protect wildlife in town and country alike. Please contact us for details of our other nature reserves, visitor centres, membership and ways in which you can help.

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