

## Woods Mill

**SORRY NO DOGS**

### A mixture of wetland and woodland habitats

Woods Mill is the headquarters of the Sussex Wildlife Trust, where the staff and volunteers beaver away in the offices on projects affecting the wildlife and habitats of the whole county. However, there is a considerable nature reserve here too — one which takes in a wide variety of habitats, and therefore provides an opportunity to experience a whole range of wildlife at first hand.

The original building is an old water mill, and water plays an important role in the whole reserve. Close to the entrance, the mill pool formed at the end of the stream trickles down past the restored water wheel into a ditch filled with yellow iris, water plantain and watercress. The nooks and crannies of ancient stone bridges provide the perfect hidey-hole for nesting grey wagtails, whose long-tailed, slim, grey, black and yellow forms can often be seen perching on the nearby roofs in summer. The stream is lined with blackthorn, hawthorn, apple, willow and other trees, which are alive with birds in spring: bullfinch, blackcap, garden



### Highlights

Nightingales, warblers, woodpeckers, turtle doves, dragonflies, wide range of water, woodland and meadow plants.

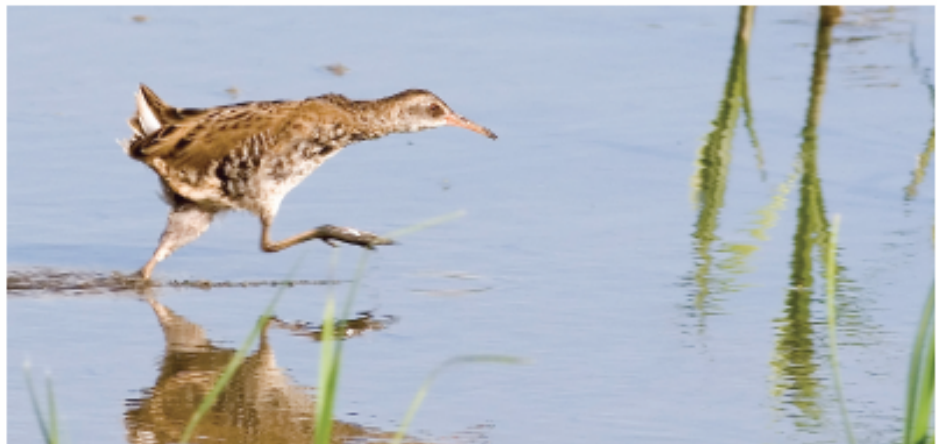
roe deer buck

Hugh Clark

warbler, robin, willow warbler and chiffchaff each pour out their song from within the rich network of light and shade. There is an extensive woodland: silver birch, oak and coppiced hazel provide a canopy for a dazzling display of spring woodland flowers including bluebells, wood anemones, moschatel and common spotted orchids. Honeysuckle provides food for the caterpillars of the white admiral butterflies which gently glide their way through the dappled pathways in summer.

However, Woods Mill is primarily a reserve for people, a place not only to visit wildlife, but to learn about it too. There are guided walks throughout the year, as well as more formal educational events for adults and children alike. You can learn about the numerous fungi that can be seen throughout the woodlands in autumn or hear the nightingales lustily singing their hearts out from the middle of a dense thicket in the evening gloom, or hunt for the eerie green glimmer of glow worms on warm summer nights.

There is no single feature that dominates Woods Mill, but the lake undoubtedly forms a major focus. Here carp and rudd nibble at the yellow and white water lilies whose pads provide landing platforms for red-eyed damselflies. Indeed the lake is a home for dragonflies of all sorts — brown and southern hawkers, red and ruddy darters, black-tailed skimmers, and even the rare scarce chaser. Along the stream the intense metallic sapphire of beautiful and banded demoiselles contrasts



water rail



Paul Marten



Mark Monk-Terry



Katja Eberstein

**Clockwise** beautiful demoiselle, pond dipping, sloes

with the powder blue of azure damselflies. The lake itself is fringed with pond sedge, the curious sweet flag that smells of oranges, and the tall stems of reedmace topped with their chocolate brown candle-like flowers that will explode into fluff the following spring. Sitting quietly the patient observer may catch the lightning blue streak of a kingfisher as it skims across the water surface.

Overhead, jackdaws are to-ing and fro-ing from their nest-hole high up in an old willow. You may be lucky enough to see one of the turtle doves that regularly breed here, or at least hear their soft, gentle purr drifting across the lake. There is a reedbed here, small in itself but large enough to support a pair or two of reed buntings and reed warblers, whose jumbling, jangling songs ring out from deep within the reed throughout the spring. On a smaller scale there is a pond with a special platform so that children may dip their nets to discover the aquatic life within — smooth and palmate newts, pond skaters, water boatmen, all of the things to fascinate young minds and encourage a love of natural history.



barn owl

Darin Smlth

There are meadows too, offering views to the South Downs filled with a huge range of grasses and wild flowers over which barn owls occasionally float in search of field voles. Stock doves, whitethroats and kestrels breed here in the trees and bushes that make up the surrounding hedgerow, as do brown, purple, and white-letter hairstreak butterflies, which can usually only be seen with binoculars, fluttering around the topmost branches of an oak or ash.

With classroom facilities and a rich, varied but compact nature reserve on the doorstep, Woods Mill is the perfect location to both teach and learn about our wildlife and its conservation, but for many it also provides a perfect quiet haven to enjoy an afternoon in the countryside.



Paul Martin

gatekeeper



Roger Wilmshurst

nightingale