

A brilliant place for birds

You've come to a great place for watching birds. Over 65 different kinds flock to Clifton Down, Durdham Down and the Avon Gorge – to feed, to raise their young or they're simply passing through. Some are very easy to get close to because they're so used to people being around, others are a little shy and it will take a bit of patience if you want to spot them.

Top tips for successful bird watching:

- 1 Try to be quiet; many birds are scared by noise.
- 2 Camouflage! Leave your brightly coloured clothes at home. Instead, wear muted colours like browns and greens to make yourself less obvious.
- 3 At points on the trail simply sit or stand still for five minutes and see what flies or hops your way.
- 4 Birds tend to be more active early morning and late afternoon.
- 5 Follow the song! Sometimes it's hard to spot birds, especially amongst dense undergrowth. If you can hear a bird singing but can't see it, try moving slowly and quietly towards the noise – often your ears will help direct your eyes to where the bird is perched.
- 6 Don't be disheartened if you don't spot all of the birds in this leaflet in one visit. Every time you come you'll see different birds – that's the joy of bird watching!
- 7 If you get the birding bug, next time you visit you may like to bring binoculars and a field guide to help you get to grips with the less common birds.

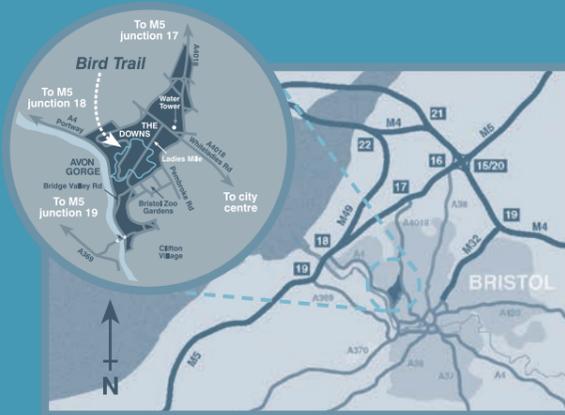
Good luck and happy bird watching!

How to get here

By Bus: There are a number of services that run past the Downs. For further information visit www.traveline.info or call Traveline on 0871 2002233.

By Train: The nearest train station is Clifton Down Station. For further information contact National Rail enquiries on 03457 484950 or visit www.traveline.info

By Road: Use the map below.



THE DOWNS Bird Trail



Contacting us

If you would like a copy of our Discover the wildlife of the Avon Gorge & Downs leaflet, copies of our other natural trail leaflets, details of our school and playscheme sessions, or our events programme please contact:

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www.avongorge.org.uk [@AvonGorgeDowns](https://www.facebook.com/avongorge)

The Avon Gorge & Downs Wildlife Project is a partnership of:



We are also working in partnership with the National Trust and the Forestry Commission (on the North Somerset side of the Gorge) and the Friends of the Downs and Avon Gorge.

With thanks to Richard Bland and Selina Cook for their help with this leaflet.
Photography and credits: Inside: Blue tit, chiffchaff, chaffinch (©Fotolia).
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Take a walk on the Downs

Discover the wildlife that thrives here

THE DOWNS Bird Trail



The complete trail takes around 1 hour. It is 2.3 km [1.4 miles] long.

SAFETY – At certain points on the trail you will need to cross roads. Please take care, especially if you have children with you.

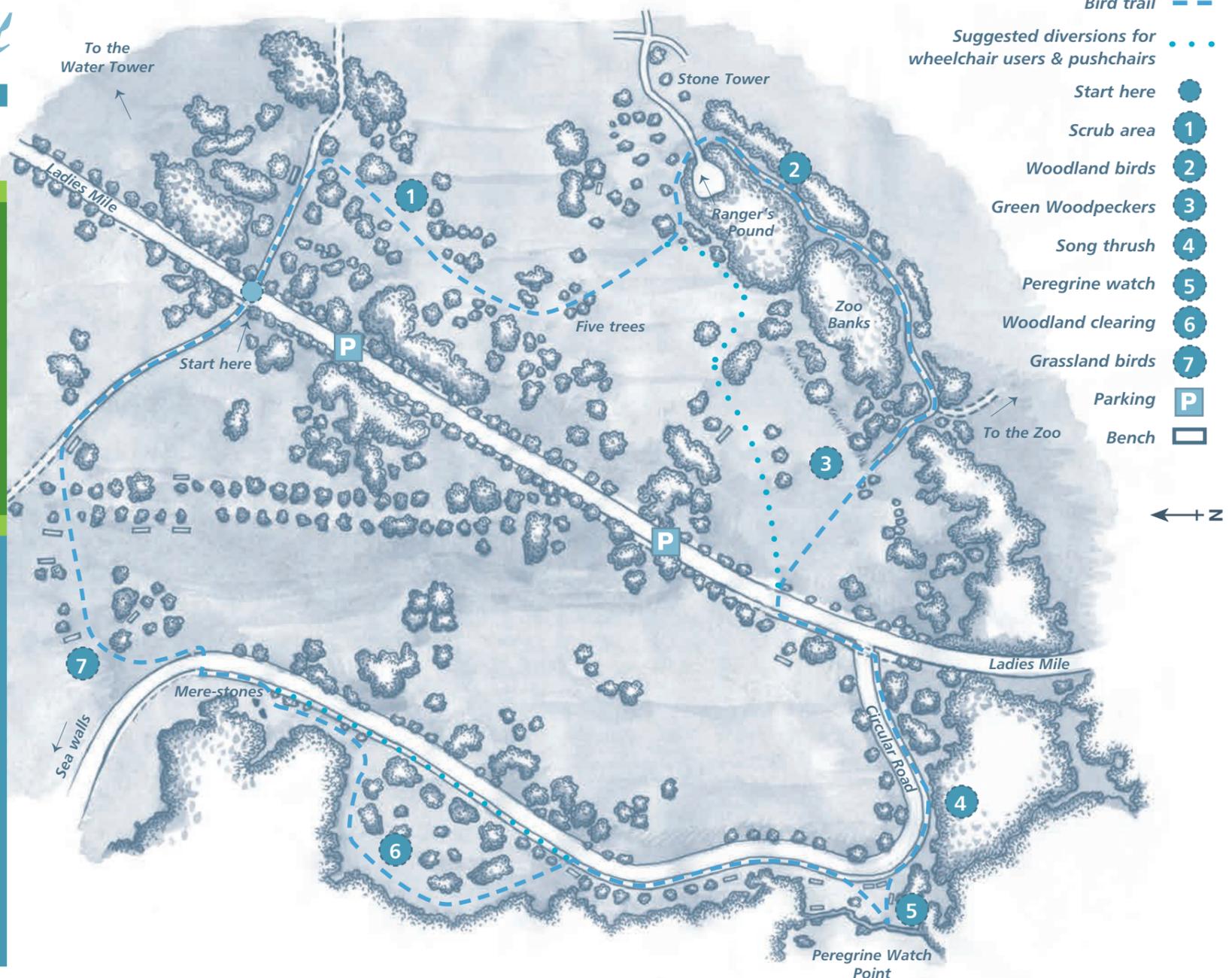
Some sections of the trail can be muddy and slippery after rain (especially Zoo Banks).



Visitors with wheelchairs and pushchairs

The route is mostly flat with no steps, significant slopes or stiles. Please follow the suggested diversions to avoid slopes and rough terrain. The paths are covered with short grass and some of them are tarmac. In spring and winter, and at times when it has been raining, some areas on the trail can be muddy.

The nearest toilets are beside the Water Tower where there are disabled toilets and baby-changing facilities.



↓ Where to begin?

The map overleaf shows our suggested route around the Downs. The trail is marked on the map with a dashed line.

There are four very common species that you are likely to see anywhere on the Downs: robin, blue tit, magpie and wood pigeon. The wren is also very common and sings its loud trill throughout the year, but is very hard to see.

As you follow the trail, you might like to tick each bird that you spot. If you don't want to keep the leaflet you could send it back to us (address on the back of this leaflet). Your results will be passed to Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre. And will be used to monitor changes in bird numbers on the Downs. Enjoy your walk!

1 Scrub areas

From the starting point cross Ladies Mile, walk for a few minutes along the tarmac path and then turn right onto the grass and down between the clumps of trees, shrubs and bramble.

These islands of scrub are often teeming with birds. Look out for blackbirds – they're normally one of the first birds that you'll see. Their rich, fruity song is a familiar sound in April and May. They also make a 'cat cat' sound when alarmed.

Male blackbirds are black with an orange or yellow beak and eye ring. The females are brown with a yellow beak. They often have streaks and spots on their breasts.



Another bird commonly seen in this area is the greenfinch. They make a range of sounds including a twitter and a noise like a creaky gate.

Blue tit, chiffchaff, chaffinch

Redwings are winter visitors to the Downs. They migrate from Scandinavia to feast on hawthorn berries and grubs that live in the grassland areas. They arrive in mid-October and leave in April.

Redwings, as the name implies, have a patch of orange-red feathers below their wings. They also have a creamy-white stripe above the eye.



In spring look for male goldfinches singing from the tops of tall trees. These charming little birds have a fast tinkling song. In flight they twitter to each other in a chatty manner as they fly over-head.

2 Woodland birds

When you reach five trees planted in a circle turn left and walk towards the woodland ahead of you. Either;

Stay on the flat and follow the woodland edge right (suitable for pushchairs and wheelchair users), or,

Go left down the slope keeping the hedge on your right. Cross over the tarmac track by the gates to the Ranger's Pound and follow the path leading in to the trees on your right.

Long-tailed tits (often described as flying lollipops!) are a little ball of white, pink and black fluff with a long tail. Listen out for their 'see-see-see' and sneezy calls. Flocks of 15 or more birds can be seen actively feeding from the tops of trees, swinging upside down to snatch their insect food.



Great tits have a black head with white cheeks. They also have a yellow chest with a black band running down the centre. Great tits make a wide range of noises but listen for their 'tee-cher, tee-cher' call in early spring.



Jays. The screeching parrot-like call of the jay is usually the first thing you'll notice, followed by a white rump as they fly away. Close up they have a pinky-beige body and a few turquoise feathers on their wings.



Chiffchaffs are small olive-brown warblers, which are hard to spot, even though they tend to sing from the tops of trees. Their characteristic 'chiff-chaff' call is regularly heard in this area from April to June.

3 When you get to the gravel path, turn right up the bank onto the Downs. Once you're up on the flat, walk straight ahead towards the road, Ladies Mile.

Listen for the laughing call (or yaffle) of the green woodpecker. A flash of olive green and its characteristic undulating flight make this an exciting bird to see on the Downs. They spend a lot of time on the ground searching for insects, especially ants.

Green woodpeckers have olive green wings with a paler green body and yellow rump. They also have a red cap and black patch around the eyes.



4 Cross Ladies Mile, then turn left and follow the tarmac path. Cross Circular Road and follow the path to the Peregrine Watch Point, keeping the woodland on your left.

Early morning in spring and summer, the woodland to your left is filled with birdsong.

Listen out for song thrushes from November to June. Their beautiful song consists of phrases that they repeat many times.



Song thrushes have an earthy-brown head, back, tail and wings and a cream and white chest covered with black spots.



At this time of year you may also hear sweet bursts of song coming from thick undergrowth. This will be from a male blackcap, a grey

warbler with a black 'cap'. They are quite secretive birds and are rarely seen.

5 Peregrine Watch

At the Peregrine Watch point you can enjoy spectacular views of the Gorge and watch some fantastic birds as well. Ravens and peregrine falcons nest here.

Mallard ducks and cormorants fly along the river. Buzzards, kestrels and sparrowhawks are often spotted too.

You can find out more about peregrines and some of the other birds that use the Gorge by reading the information sign here.



6 Woodland clearing

Turn your back on the Gorge and head back to the road. Turn left and walk along the path. When you get to the third bench leave the path and go left. Walk along the woodland edge. In the central grassy clearing stand still for a few minutes.

This is a lovely sheltered spot where you might see and hear chaffinches. Their song can be heard from March to June and sounds like a drum roll ending with the words, 'ginger-beer'.

Also listen out for a very high-pitched song that goes round in circles. It belongs to the goldcrest, Europe's smallest bird.

Male bullfinches are very handsome birds with a pink chest, a black cap, tail and wings, a grey back and white rump. Females have similar markings but are dowdier. They are very shy and elusive but listen for their very quiet 'pew-pew' piping call.



7 Grassland birds

At the end of the clearing, turn right and walk towards the road again. Turn left and walk along the woodland edge, looking out for birds as you go. You'll come to two stones sticking out of the ground; one bears the letters CP the other WP. These are the 'mere-stones' or boundary stones that mark the border of Clifton Parish and Westbury Parish, and divide Clifton Down and Durdham Down. At this point, cross over the road. Wheelchair users – Please cross where there is a dip in the curb.

Once on the other side, look left towards the football pitches where grass is mown very short and is rich in worms and insect grubs. These areas attract members of the crow family throughout the year. Can you tell them apart?



Rooks have a bare, greyish-white face with sleek black plumage.



The tops of their legs are covered by 'feathery breeches'. They are very sociable birds and feed in flocks. Rooks roost in Ashton Court (one of the largest rookeries in the area) and commute over to the Downs each day to feed.

Crows are a similar size to rooks but lack the white face and 'feathery breeches'. They also have a more rounded head and shorter, less pointed beak.



Jackdaws are the smallest of the three. These inquisitive black birds have a small triangular bill, grey back of the head and white eyes. They are sociable birds and are normally found in pairs or small flocks. Their call is a 'jack-jack' sound.

Other birds that can be seen feeding on the football pitches include black-headed gulls in the winter, and throughout the year herring and lesser black-backed gulls.

You are now just a couple of hundred metres from where you started the trail. We hope you enjoyed your walk and will come back bird watching again soon!

Other birds you saw on your walk:

Date: