

# Redway Nature Trail

You can start the trail at any point round the loop, we have started at the railway station as it's a good assembly point. The trail is quite long at (18 km) so you may want to do it in two halves by cutting back across the middle. The extensive Redway system should ensure that there is very little if any cycling on the road required.

The trail has been designed so that there are some parts where you may want to walk as there are many things to see, for example in the Walton hall area where the trail links to the existing Walton hall nature trail.

It is best to print out the directions and map in addition to these nature notes. The colour coding on the left-hand side of these notes indicates sections you may want to read together to avoid stopping too frequently.

Start Milton Keynes station. A very urban concrete and glass environment but with nice smooth surfaces for cycling and skateboarding. From this hostile beginning it appears there will be no nature to look at but read on to find that MK has plenty of plants, animals, birds and insects and a wide range of different habitats.

1. Teardrop lakes – Cycling along here some of the most obvious things to look out for are Reedmace (*Typha latifolia*) plants around the lakes with their long sword like bright green leaves and cylindrical seedheads. Many of the trees in this area are poplars [white or grey poplars identifiable by the diamond shaped markings on the trunk]. They tend to have alkaline bark which neutralises some of the effects of acid rain and allows a good range of lichens to develop. The other place where lichens are very obvious is on the small bridge between the lakes which is covered in bright orange/yellow *Xanthoria*. If you look closely there are also tiny mosses such as Grey cushion moss (*Grimmia pulvinata*) with its long silvery hairs and fruit capsules on curved stalks which gradually straighten up.



2. The bowl – the setting for many concerts and park and ride schemes. But did you notice the little stream flowing beside the track as you cycled past? It looks to me like one of the very few fast flowing streams in Milton Keynes, I wonder if it has a range of interesting aquatic creatures that depend on the high levels of oxygen only found in this type of stream. I have not investigated further as the water might be polluted. You can find detailed information on some of the other watercourses in the MK on the Environment Agency website (<http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/>) as they carry out detailed chemical and biological monitoring on a regular basis.



3. Crossing the tracks. Looking down at the A5D dual carriageway road and main west coast mainline railway embankments, there is an unusual array of plants resulting from the damp calcium rich clay soil. The plant species probably include orchids, teasels, rushes, centuary and other calcicoles. There is no access to the embankments here but a similar range of plants can be seen much better at Blue lagoon nature reserve in Bletchley, this reserve has a good display of orchids and many other calcareous clay plant species, it also has a good range of dragonflies in its pools. Mount Farm, a short deviation off the main trail at Ashlands also has similar clay with bee orchids and its lake has rather nice yellow water-lilies and a new heronry so is well worth a visit if you have a little extra time.



4. Granby roundabout. While you are working out which route to take glance at the trees and shrubs. There are hawthorn, dog rose, sloe, apple and several other members of the rose family (Rosaceae). The seeds and buds of these bushes provide food for bullfinches which are relatively common in some parts of Milton Keynes so next time you catch a glimpse of a red bird with white rump flashing across the redway and vanishing into a bush think male bullfinch.

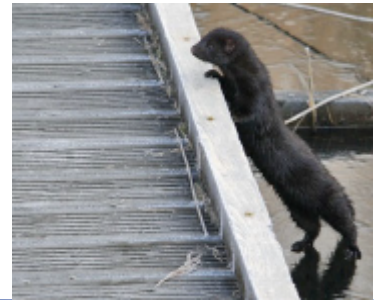


5. Ashland – the new ponds here are an attempt to make a flood storage system more pleasant and wildlife friendly. With all the new building and roads much of the land surface is now covered in concrete and tarmac so when there is heavy rain water can't seep into the soil and instead it runs off rapidly into drains then floods the rivers. Schemes such as the one here store some of this excess water from the local stream by flooding the grassland and allowing the water out into the river more slowly.



6. Simpson along the canal or road past the farm. Canal dates from... some of the main fish in the canal are....

7. Walton lake. At this point the trail links with the Walton Hall nature trail which has details of the plants and animals living in this area, ([http://www.open.ac.uk/Nature\\_Trail/O\\_view.htm](http://www.open.ac.uk/Nature_Trail/O_view.htm)). I wrote that trail in 1995, since then two bird hides and boardwalk through the reedbed have been installed and there are information boards provided by the Parks Trust.



8. Monkston park river section. There are several gates and cattle grids to watch out for in this section. They are necessary to keep in the grazing animals which maintain this section, at present the grassland here is not particularly diverse but hopefully over the years ahead more wild flowers will come in. The river here is relatively untamed with meanders, riffles, cutoff channels, islands, and having high banks with potential for kingfisher nest-holes. Indeed it is ideal for teaching river geomorphology if any school teachers are listening and fancy taking the kids out for some fieldwork.



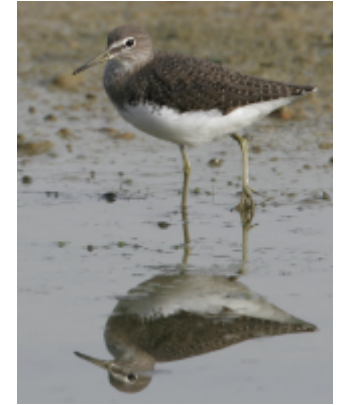
9. Woolstone - a good range of dragonflies and damselflies are very common all along the river Ouzel indicating its relatively unpolluted status. Look out for species such as the common darter, brown hawker, white-legged damselfly, migrant hawker and banded demoiselle. It is often difficult to recognise which dragonfly has just zoomed across as you are cycling along but if you want a closer look then check out bushes near the water early in the morning on a sunny day. You will often find large numbers of the insects sitting quietly warming up for the days activity.



10. South lake Willan. As you arrive its quite a different feeling coming into the poplar plantation compared to the miles of open river bank that you have just passed. The trees are all around and give a pleasant feeling of enclosure and speed as you zoom past the tree trunks. These poplars are very fast growing and ideally suited to planting in wet areas. The south lake is very heavily used by water sports enthusiasts with the cable ski tow and all sorts of other craft on the water. But I wonder how many of these people realise that in addition to all the bread fed to geese and ducks, several thousand gulls use the lake as a night roost site during the winter so making the water a rather 'fertile' soup for anyone who falls in.



11. North lake Willan bird hide. In summer one of the most obvious and unusual species to be seen are common terns which nest on the island and often perch on the posts in front of the hide. They look like rather delicate seagulls but with effortless flight and sometimes hovering and plunging down to snap up a fish. Other common species include herons also nesting on the island, kingfishers, various ducks and geese but also some interesting passage migrants in spring and late summer. These can include: redshank, ringed plover, greenshank and common sandpiper.



12. view of peace pagoda, stone circle and temple.



13. Redwood grove. Part way along the long straight redway there is a clump of conifers, mostly coast Redwoods (*Sequoia sempervirens*). These are youngsters but just imagine what a whole forest of them 100m tall would be like. They are the ultimate plant, they live for thousands of years, they can reproduce by seeds or resprouts, almost nothing eats them and they cast such dense shade that nothing lives below them. No wonder they were a dominant species over large chunks of the land during the geological past, now they are native to just a tiny piece of California but with global warming their time may come again.



14. Over the canal and past the Parks Trust office. This area has a wide variety of trees and shrubs, many of which provide berries for birds such as redwings which come here in the winter from mainland Europe. When cycling along you sometimes get hit by insects that have fallen out of trees or have rather erratic flight such as shieldbugs. These large bugs are common from spring to autumn in MK and come in a variety of colours from blue through reds and greens to brown.



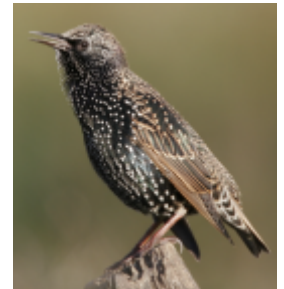
15. Campbell park. A sheep grazed city park with many pressures but still manages to have a relaxed rural feel. Have you noticed the daisies (*Bellis perennis*), I'd never taken much notice of them but after showing botanists from all over the world around, the humble daisy is one of the main plants they remark on. The profusion here seems to be uniquely British.



16. Theatre district and plane trees. City air is purified by plants especially these avenues of plane trees (*Platanus xhispanica*) which also help to cool the atmosphere in summer. During the day leaves take in carbon dioxide and give out oxygen, in the process they also loose large amounts of water vapour which cools their environment. In addition particles of pollution in the air, such as those given out by traffic, are captured on leaves and bark so don't end up damaging people's lungs. Try to find lichens on the plane tree trunks like you did on the poplar trunks at stop 2, I bet there will be many fewer as when the plane trees shed their bark they also shed the slow growing lichens.



17. The city centre is particularly nice in the early morning when there are few people around and you have time to appreciate the artworks, and dappled light filtering through tree lined boulevards. You can also catch up with wildlife such as starlings feeding on last night's discarded food scraps, watch pied wagtails running around after insects and do some window shopping.



18. Going on past the shopping area the 'business district' has a number of quiet squares with fountains, seats and greenery. It is worth stopping here especially in spring or autumn to see the colourful leaves on the trees in contrast to all the glass and brick around. Some of the physical benefits of trees have already been mentioned, studies have shown the benefits of having trees to mental wellbeing and to crime reduction. Here in the business district think what it would be like if it were a purely concrete jungle with no plants to soften the environment.



**END**



Links to the new Snail activity website and logos from OU and anyone else. Don't forget to record your sighting of snails (and other wildlife) at the snail hunt website [print out their 'sightings' sheet before you go on the trail as a reminder of what to look out for].

Lots more of the wildlife from around the Redway trail can be found on the Redway nature trail website.