

Lorton Meadows

Walking
trails inside



Dorset Wildlife Trust
Making space for nature

VISITOR INFORMATION

Opening hours

The nature reserve is open every day of the year. The Lorton Meadows Conservation Centre is only open for pre-arranged events. Visit our website for details: dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk

Location

Lorton Meadows Conservation Centre
Lorton Lane, Weymouth, Dorset, DT3 5QH

The Conservation Centre is at the end of Lorton Lane, off Dorchester Road (B3159). Look out for the brown sign. There is no access to the reserve from the Weymouth Relief Road (A354).

Toilets

The nearest public toilets are marked on the map at Mount Pleasant Park and Ride, DT3 5HJ. A 5 minute drive or a 10–15 minute walk from the Conservation Centre.

Dogs on leads

To protect wildlife and to ensure everyone's safety and enjoyment of this nature reserve, please keep your dog on a short lead and do not walk dogs through fields where cattle are grazing or where there is a 'No dogs here' sign.



Contact us

T: 01305 206191 [Twitter: @DWTWeyPort](https://twitter.com/DWTWeyPort)
E: chesilbeach@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk

Please take note

- Please be a responsible wildlife watcher and follow the Countryside Code
- Give wildlife plenty of space
- Take your rubbish home
- Bag and remove dog poo from the site
- Do not light fires or BBQs
- Grazing livestock all year round
- Be tick aware for yourself and your dog
- Do not enter ponds or rivers and steer clear of wet and boggy ground



Danger
Deep Water

BECOME A MEMBER



Help protect Dorset's wildlife

Dorset Wildlife Trust manages and protects over **40 nature reserves** in Dorset; safe havens for some of the UK's most important wildlife.

We can only do this work with support from our members. Support local wildlife today and receive our regular membership magazine and a comprehensive guide to all 40 Dorset Wildlife Trust nature reserves. Just call **01305 264620** or email membership@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk



VOLUNTEER



As a charity, we rely on volunteers to help us with all sorts of tasks from scrub clearance and wildlife surveys to manning the visitor centres and organising events.

Volunteers come to us for all sorts of reasons: to do their bit, to get healthy, to stay healthy, for the social element, for fun, for the challenge, to learn new skills, to practice old skills, to prepare for the workplace, to help wildlife, to get out into the fresh air, to learn about wildlife, to carry on using skills during retirement - and occasionally it's just to give it a go.

Part of the national movement of
The Wildlife Trusts
Registered Charity No. 200222



Dorset Wildlife Trust HQ, Brooklands Farm,
Forston, Dorchester, Dorset, DT2 7AA

Explore the reserve

Lorton Meadows nature reserve lies in a hidden valley close to the centre of Weymouth. The area was traditionally farmed for over 200 years without the use of pesticides or herbicides. As a result, the mixture of habitats provides opportunities for a wide range of plant, bird and animal species. In spring and summer, the site is brimming with wildflowers and butterflies.

Visit Meadow Barn to find information about Lorton Meadows to plan your day. The network of walking trails allows visitors to explore the reserve and find a variety of wildlife.

Lorton Meadows nature reserve covers an area of 75 hectares (185 acres) and is owned and managed by Dorset Wildlife Trust, who purchased the land in 1998.

Prior to this, the land was farmed since at least the Enclosure Act and many of the small meadows retain their original ditches and hedges. These are key Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The reserve also has areas of compact mature woodland, providing habitat for a range of birds and animals. The Conservation Centre was formerly a barn built in 1820. Restored with the help of our partners, it is now the start point for

volunteer tasks, family activities, guided walks and school visits.

The best times to visit are spring, summer and autumn when a dazzling array of wildflower and butterfly species can be seen in the meadows. Winterbourne streams and ponds provide habitat later in the year for amphibians, dragonfly species and other insects. Clay soils in winter mean the ground becomes muddy and slippery. Cattle graze the meadows all year so don't forget your wellies and please keep dogs on a lead.

SPECIES TO SPOT AT LORTON MEADOWS

In early spring, the miles of ancient blackthorn hedgerows at Lorton burst into blossom whilst warblers, finches and other birds return to breed. Areas of dense mixed woodland (beech, hazel, oak and holly) provide further breeding sites, food and shade. Barn owl and kestrel may be seen nesting near the Conservation Centre. Other birds of prey include buzzard, marsh harrier and occasionally red kite. Lorton's mammal list includes good populations of vole as well as fox, badger and roe deer.

Spring is a great time to explore the mosaic of small meadows with a wide variety of flowering plants including early purple orchid, cowslip and bird's-foot trefoil. In summer, look for bee orchid, common

knapweed, ox eye daisy and fleabane. It's also a good time to see the reserve come alive with butterflies including common blue, meadow brown, large skipper, marbled white and purple hairstreak. Mini beasts abound and Lorton's mild climate and rich flora provide them with vital space to feed and raise young.

Autumn is a good time for bat sightings including noctule, the UK's largest species. The mild conditions mean dragonflies are often still on the wing in October, and the hedgerows brim with blackberries and sloes. Hardy plants like gorse can still be in flower in winter, whilst woodpeckers become more visible as trees drop their leaves, and murmurations of starlings sometimes occur over the reserve.



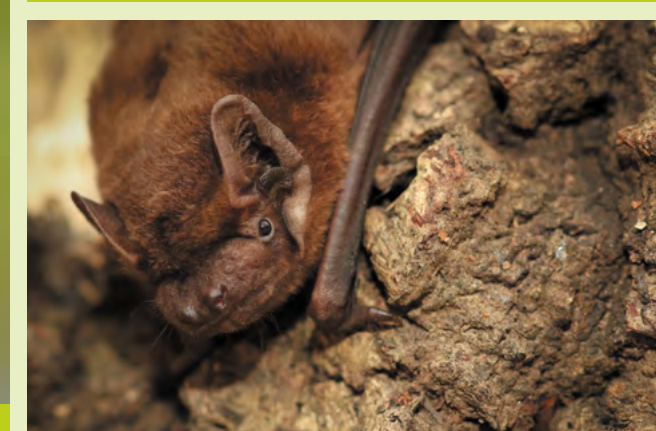
Common blue butterfly © John Bridges



Early purple orchid
© Chris Gomersall/2020VISION



Barn owl © Paul Williams



Noctule bat © Tom Marshall

Walking trails

Follow the directions, use the map below and look for trail markers on gates and posts as you go. Watch out for cow pats (which can be slippery) and be aware that the ground may be uneven, muddy, slippery and steep in some areas.



Short circular walk

Distance approx. 1km/0.6 miles

- 1 For a short walk, start from the Conservation Centre and turn left towards the wooden signpost. The field gate ahead leads into a wooded meadow.
- 2 Once through the gate, walk left through the meadow. In mid-summer look for drifts of flowering fleabane.
- 3 As you continue walking, the oak trees become more dominant. Many of these grew from acorns, buried by colourful jays in autumn to be eaten in winter. Continue through the woodland until you reach a kissing gate on your left.
- 4 Head through the gate and go straight ahead towards the wood on the far side of this larger meadow. This is part of the SSSI. You may spot large grassy mounds which are ant hills (made by yellow meadow ants), some of which are decades old.
- 5 Once you reach the opposite corner, look left towards the cottages which are near the Conservation Centre. Walk back along the grassy path, bordered in spring by buttercups and cowslips.
- 6 As you return to the Centre, look out for the kestrel nest boxes high up in Withy Wood. Go through the field gate at the end of the wood to return to the Conservation Centre.

Medium circular walk

Distance approx. 2.6km/1.6 miles

- 1 From the Conservation Centre, turn right and walk downhill, past the car park through the field gate. Follow the path along the hedge line on the left. These fields are part of the SSSI. In spring, look out for flowering lesser celandine and bugle.
- 2 At the corner of the meadow, go through the right-hand gate and carry on along the left hand hedge line to the next set of gates. Turn sharp left through this gate to go up the steep hill. The ancient double hedge and ditch to the left may have been used to move contraband and is known as Smugglers' Hedge.
- 3 Once at the top of the hill, take in the fantastic view of Weymouth and Portland. This is the start of the 14-mile Legacy Trail to Portland Bill.
- 4 Walk diagonally through the open meadow towards the woodland that extends down the far ridge. This is Horse Lynch Plantation which is 200 years old and dominated by tall beech trees. Look for woodpecker and buzzard using the wood and marsh harrier hunting low over the reeds.
- 5 When you reach the gate by the woodland, carry on through into the hay meadow below. Follow the path downhill alongside thick hedges on the right. In spring, look for pink grass vetchling before the grasses obscure them. In the evening, listen for tawny owls. Turn right through the field gates into the next meadow, then walk towards the hedge line opposite.
- 6 Go through the kissing gates and cross another meadow, sticking to the paths that lead through the hedges. Look for emperor dragonflies along the way. You will enter a small field where pipsitrelle bats often hunt at dusk. Bear left and you will soon go through a kissing gate and be walking alongside the edge of Two Mile Coppice. You are now back on the SSSI.

Long circular walk

Distance approx. 3.4km/2.1 miles

- 1 From the Conservation Centre, walk uphill along the main access road to a kissing gate leading into a small field on the right. This part of the SNCI is full of plants like bird's-foot trefoil and common blue butterfly in summer.
- 2 Walk downhill past the trimmed ash tree and you will come to a gate and bridge leading into the next field. Before entering, spend a minute looking for gatekeeper butterflies in the summer months.
- 3 In the next meadow, follow the path uphill towards the woodland on the right. Views of historic Lorton House on left. Flowering plants in this field include gorse and fleabane.
- 4 Enter the next field and follow the path along the edge of Coffin Plantation, planted over 200 years ago with beech trees. Continue into the wood, up the steps and turn right at the top.
- 5 At the fork in the path, continue left uphill. The woodland is more mixed here and includes oak and ash. At the top of the wood, you may notice a small brick building and bunker (kept locked) dating back to World War II. Decoy fires were lit here to draw bombers away from the town. Back out into the open, pause awhile and take in the view of Weymouth and Portland. This is the start of the 14-mile Legacy Trail to Portland Bill.
- 6 Walk downhill through the long open meadow ahead, towards the woodland that extends down the ridge towards the reedbed. This is Horse Lynch Plantation, 200 years old and dominated by tall beech trees. Look for buzzards over the wood and marsh harriers hunting over the reeds.
- 7 Look for an open pathway that skirts alongside the plantation to the right. You will see along the path many younger trees which were planted in 2010 by local schools, community groups and Dorset Wildlife Trust volunteers.
- 8 Carry on along this path as it turns right, then head downhill and take in the spectacular views. To the east is White Horse Hill with its chalk carving. To the west is Lodmoor, Weymouth and Portland.
- 9 Further downhill, take a detour left for the Community Orchard. Pick an apple if ripe. The trees were planted in 2016 by Bincombe Valley School pupils and Dorset Wildlife Trust volunteers.
- 10 At this point, turn right and follow the path through Horse Lynch Plantation to the kissing gate on the other side. Then follow the path downhill through the hay meadow towards the hedge opposite.
- 11 Go through the kissing gates across two meadows, sticking to the path that runs through the hedges. Look for emperor dragonflies along the way. You will enter a small field where pipistrelle bats often hunt at dusk.
- 12 Bear left and soon after, go through a kissing gate. Walk along the edge of Two Mile Coppice to your left, through another kissing gate and across a boardwalk. Walk to the kissing gate in the hedge line opposite. Look out for large grassy ant hills made by yellow meadow ants.
- 13 Go through the kissing gate into the wooded meadow, turn right and follow the path until you reach beehives on your left and a kissing gate on the right to return to the Conservation Centre.

