Westhay Moor is part of the mystical Avalon Marshes within Somerset's Historic Levels and Moors. It provides a home for rare wildlife and a unique insight into thousands of years of shifting landscapes. Wildlife can experience the local landscape as it was when you first visited. Heathers, heaths, made the moors home, and can explore the reserve's diverse habitats that are bustling with incredible wildlife throughout the seasons.

What is Westhay Moor special? Designated as a National Nature Reserve, Westhay Moor was an pioneering conservation project by Somerset Wildlife Trust. The area of Westhay Moor used to be an industrial site of peat workings, but thanks to the conservation work of Somerset Wildlife Trust, channels, islands, and scrubland have been restored over the 100 hectares of peat moors to create habitats where wildlife can thrive. For example, the restored reedbeds have been transformed into a network of open water and rushes which provide habitat for waders such as Bittern, where the bittern, which has been thriving there in recent years.

The reserve has the largest surviving fragment of lowland raised moor in the South West, where you will find seven species of Sphagnum Moss growing. The moor is also good for the Microbathe, a moth which was extinct in 1986 but has made a comeback to Westhay - it was recorded there in 1996. In the ornithological Microbathe, the haven for the wildlife of the reserve is the peaceful sound of water and reedbeds, so you may see lots of heron species perched on the water, and if you're really lucky, an Otter.

Pedal power! If you are keen to cycle, there is a national cycle route that runs through the Westhay village - a great way of seeing the local area before exploring the reserve. There is a bike rack to leave your bike before you head into the reserve.

Smile! Daisy, a photo under the snow that you see just as you enter the reserve.

Find hidden. You can find hidden in boxes throughout the reserve. To navigate yourself with GPS - known as Geocaching. Find out more at www.somersetwildlife.org/Geocaching.

History of Westhay Moor

Prior to 1945

The peat was dug by hand with low mechanised tools, and then burnt as a natural heat source.

After 1945

Commercial supply and reclamation of peat started. A lot of the peat was mechanically operated with machines to do the peat extraction.

How Westhay Moor looks today

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What to look out for

Starting at the car park you will be met with the first suggestion that will give you the chance of seeing the Avon long Otter trail, marked by Otter footprints on way-markers, or the Talus Cycle trail marked by Cost Footprints. If you choose you both lead to the first hide of the reserve, the Viridor Hide, and from the Otter trail you will walk through a network of reedbeds and wet woodlands of Alder and Willow.

Key

- Car park
- Disabled car park
- Information board
- Reserve path
- Restricted byway
- Otter Trail
- Cost Trail (easy access)
- Guide
- Scrub
- Trees
- Open water
- Reedbed
- Grass
- Bog Nire
- Hide
- Hide

While you are here, why not visit Dorset too?

Adidas
- Enjoy the local Adidas
- Can be seen on the Opele Moor pages in various footprints.

Cotton Grasses
- Eriophorum angustifolium
- Bracken
- Provides a wonderful backdrop location across the landscape.

Bittern
- Botaurus stellaris
- All year round
- In winter, you can find them snowing around small pools.

Redshanks
- Stemmadicola rubra
- All year round
- In spring, you can see them in amongst Wigeon and great crested grebe, glossy ibis and woolly bird.

Emperor Dragonflies
- Anax imperator
- All year round
- In summer, you can see them leaping about among many other dragonflies, crawling in amongst the rushes.

Shelduck
- Tadorna tadorna
- All year round
- In summer, you can see them feeding in the reedbeds.

Stellings
- Sterna sandvicensis
- Winter
- From flying overhead in their stunning migrations.

Owls
- All year round
- Over the winter, you can see them perched on refuges and zoom in large trees.

Great White Egrets
- Ardea alba
- All year round
- In spring, you can see them zip past on the reedbeds.

Cattis Owls
- All year round
- In winter, you can see them perched on the reedbeds.

Grey Herons
- Ardea cinerea
- All year round
- Often seen standing stock still in the shallows.

Kingfishers
- Alcedo atthis
- All year round
- You can see them zip past over the lakes.

Marsh Harriers
- Circus aeruginosus
- During the breeding season you will see them flitting about, nesting on the reedbeds.

Bearded Reedlings
- Panurus biarmicus
- All year round
- You can see them in amongst the reeds, letting off their distinctive singing voice.

What to take...

Bring binoculars and a tent guide to make sure you do not miss a single moment.

Take photos, each of it’s been amazing watching how wildlife interacts with the reserve terrain.

Take stopwatch, make your own record of the temperature during the day. Learn about your birds before you see them. In our reserve bring a bird box, make your own records, and keep the hide where you take them. Take your camera to catch the slumber of the day.

Check the weather before you leave the hotel, bring a jacket and shoes to keep you going. In bad weather, food and water and make sure you have a warm dry place to stay. In colder weather, bring your own warm dry place to stay.

What to see...

Past to present

Past is the partially decayed remains of organic matter such as roots, seeds, mosses and even trees, and it forms in wet environments. Old peat has returned to how it was starting around 6,000 to 7,000 years BC and continuing to about 400 AD. Westhay Moor used to be an industrial site of peat diggings, however thanks to the work of Somerset Wildlife Trust, the area has been transformed over the years and has become the ideal nesting habitat for Great White Egrets and Bittern. Today Westhay Moor has returned to how it was before it was intensively dug for peat, and has beautiful carvings on the hide. Westhay Moor is part of the mystical Avalon Marshes and now provides a mosaic of habitat for a wide range of incredible wildlife. You are more likely to see them in winter.

Alcedo atthis
- Common Kingfisher
- All year round
- In summer, you can see them leaping about among many other dragonflies, crawling in amongst the rushes.

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