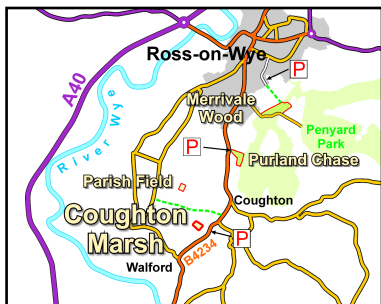


Coughton Marsh

Walford SO590210 (Outdoor Leisure 14)

SSSI

Wet woodland and fen dominated by alder coppice



Visitor Guidelines

Even in summer, the site can be very wet and muddy, so boots are advisable at all seasons. Narrow winding access paths and lush summer growth combine to make losing your sense of direction quite easy, even in a reserve this small!

Description

The reserve is the last remnant of a much larger peaty wetland area that existed in the 19th century. The marsh is what remains of a former watercourse of the River Wye, occupying all the low-lying ground between Coughton and Old Hill Court. The name 'Coughton' is derived from 'hillock settlement', possibly indicating a drier raised area within the marsh. A fine Neolithic axe found on the site also attests to ancient settlement here.

Although small, and surrounded by open agricultural land, the marsh woodland is of great historical and biological interest because it is the only area of plateau Alder woodland now left in the lower Wye valley. The canopy consists of impressive relict alder *coppice stools* covered in ivy. Oak and Ash *standards* are occasional. Hazel *coppice*, Hawthorn, Elder and Spindle help form a *shrub layer*, together with Goat Willow, Blackthorn, Guelder Rose and Redcurrant. The latter, in particular, have colonised areas of previously cleared ground to form scrub woodland. A few open clearings dominated by rank fen vegetation increase the diversity of habitat found in this small reserve.

Present Management

The woodland is traditionally managed on a rotation as *coppice* with *standards*, except for a small area in the N.E. corner, which has been designated as a non-intervention area. Nest boxes for both birds and Dormice are provided, and tying down long overhead lengths of *coppice* pole has made Dormouse 'crossings' over paths. The fen meadow areas are cut and cleared annually and a network of access paths is kept open by periodic mowing.

Acquisition Details

Freehold bought in 1984 with grant aid from English Nature.

The reserve is designated as a *Site of Special Scientific Interest* by English Nature in recognition of its importance for wildlife and conservation.

General Information:

Best time to visit: Spring and Summer.

Habitat: Wet woodland and fen dominated by alder *coppice*.

Size: 1.2 hectares (3 acres).

Specialities: Dormice (the reserve is a key site for this attractive mouse and the nestbox population is regularly monitored by licensed recorders), Yellow-necked mice, Dark Bush Cricket (8-10), Herb Paris (4-5), Ragged Robin (7), Marsh Marigold (4-5), Yellow Iris (7), Fleabane (7-8), Fen Bedstraw (7-8), Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Blackcap and Great Spotted woodpecker all breed regularly on the reserve.

Parking: Park in the lay-by outside Walford Primary School.

Nearby reserves: Purland Chase, Parish Field, Merrivale Wood & Pool Ellocks.

