

Discover Lakeside

Welcome to your Discover Lakeside Nature Trail



The content of this trail has been developed by the Doncaster Lakeside Wildlife Action Group. Visit their webpage <http://lakesidewildlifeactiongroup.weebly.com/> or follow them on twitter @wildlifelakeDN4

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How to do the trail:

This trail can be done in any order. Look out for the 'QR codes' around the Lake and match the number in the bottom right hand corner to the sections in this booklet.

Discover Lakeside

1. Swans at Doncaster Lakeside

The swans at Lakeside are Mute Swans (*Cygnus Olor*). Although they are usually sometimes hiss or snort when angry. Cygnets make a soft whistling sound. A male has a larger black base on its beak.

Swans feed on water vegetation, insects and snails, but also occasionally graze on land. The swans at Lakeside have three or four favourite nest sites and do pair up, but not every year. Sometimes they are not successful, due to interference.

In 2016 a pair of swans hatched six cygnets and reared five of them successfully. Lakeside is home to a resident swan population, but sees a lot of arrivals and departures during the year. It is a popular site for young adolescent swans, as well as a reasonably safe haven for them to gather in numbers.

You may see birds with small metal rings on their legs, also large yellow or red ringed groups ring birds all over the country, including at Lakeside, recording the movements of the birds. Three of the 2016 cygnets had been ringed by the end of the year.



Have a smartphone? Download a QR code reader from your app store and scan each code as you walk around the lake.

FACT:

The whole pathway around the lake is almost **2 miles**; that's about **4,000 steps**!

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1. Swans at Doncaster Lakeside

The swans at Lakeside are Mute Swans (*Cygnus Olor*). Although they are usually silent, they sometimes hiss or snort when angry. Cygnets make a soft whistling sound. A male swan has a larger black base on its beak.

Swans feed on water vegetation, insects and snails, but also occasionally graze on short grass. The swans at Lakeside have three or four favourite nest sites and do pair up, nest and rear young most years. Sometimes they are not successful, due to interference.

In 2016 a pair of swans hatched six cygnets and reared five of them successfully. Doncaster Lakeside is home to a resident swan population, but sees a lot of arrivals and departures, so numbers vary during the year. It is a popular site for young adolescent swans, as it is a large and reasonably safe haven for them to gather for safety in numbers.

You may see birds with small metal rings on their legs, also large yellow or red rings. Swan ringing groups ring birds all over the country, including at Lakeside, recording the place of origin. Three of the 2016 cygnets had been ringed by the end of the year.

2. Geese at Doncaster Lakeside

Most of the geese at Lakeside are Canada Geese (*Branta Canadensis*). This breed was originally introduced to the UK from North America in the 17th century, so is now a firmly established resident, with some migration between England, Scotland and France.

Geese are noisy creatures, they live in flocks and communicate frequently with a trumpeting, honking cry, including when in flight. They eat water vegetation and also graze on grass and browse on other plants. They have rarely if ever bred at Lakeside.

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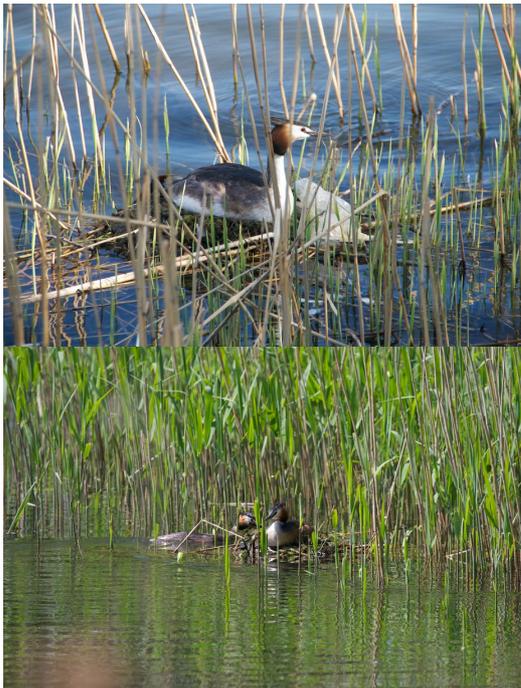
3. Butterflies at Doncaster Lakeside

Butterflies and moths are found mostly on the hills and islands at Lakeside. Local enthusiasts take part in an annual national Big Butterfly Count. The butterflies recorded include gatekeeper, small white, large white, green-veined white, peacock, speckled brown and meadow brown.



The islands, with native meadow planting, are also a very good habitat for six-spot burnet moths.

4. Reedbeds at Doncaster Lakeside



Lakeside, where it has naturalized edges, supports two main reed beds, which play a part in maintaining healthy water conditions. The reed beds are important habitats for water birds, especially at nesting time.

Coots, Moorhens and Great Crested Grebes are known to nest and rear young every year in these areas. Swans do build nests in these areas, but usually too close to the paths, so subject to interference and failure.

Plants in the Lakeside reed beds include Phragmites and Bulrushes.

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5. Moorhens and Doncaster Lakeside

Moorhens (*Gallinula Chloropus*) are a familiar sight at the Lakeside, particularly near the reed beds and lake edge bushes. They are smaller than Coots and can be distinguished by their red and yellow-tipped beaks.

Their feet are not fully webbed like ducks, but are lobed (frilly) to allow them to use their long toes to clamber around and even roost in bushes and reeds. They feed on water weed, seeds, berries, small fish, worms, insects, spiders and snails. The Lakeside Moorhens nest and rear young every year in the reed beds.



6. Cormorants at Doncaster Lakeside



Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax Carbo*) are traditionally seen as coastal birds, but are now also commonly seen on inland lakes and rivers. They use Lakeside as a fishing ground, and seem to arrive more in winter.

They perch on the Lakeside buoys and at least six can often be seen. They fly around to scan for fish and bob about on the surface of the water, diving to swim underwater for quite a long time, emerging with fish in their beaks.

When returning to perch, they can be seen with wings outstretched, which is thought to assist wing drying.

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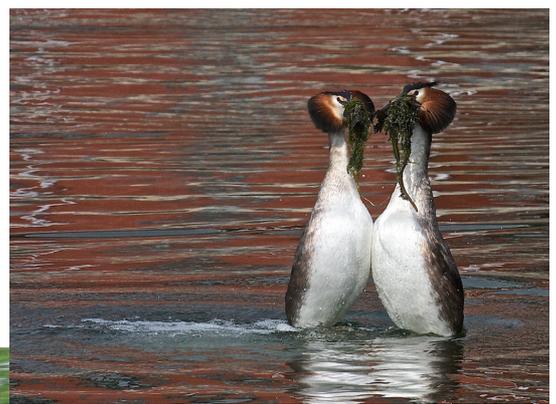
7. Grebes at Doncaster Lakeside

Great Crested Grebes (*Podiceps Cristatus*) are very distinctive water birds, with their elegant shape and crested heads.

They eat mostly fish and can be seen swimming around, scanning through the surface of the water and then diving underwater for quite long periods of time. They emerge and sometimes appear to struggle to swallow the fish they have caught.

Their courtship dance involves facing each other shaking heads, simultaneous diving and emerging with water weed hanging from their beaks. Great Crested Grebes nest in the reed beds every year at Lakeside and rear young. Their nests are very untidy and they tend to leave them as soon as the eggs are hatched and the babies can ride on the parents' backs. As the black and white striped youngsters grow big enough to follow their parents around, they can be heard making a peep peep sound calling for food.

Little Grebes (*Tachybaptus Ruficollis*) are visitors to Lakeside. They are much smaller and plainer than the Great Crested, with under-tail feathers they can fluff up. They are very shy birds who dive if observed or disturbed. They feed on insects, snails and small fish. Little Grebes do nest and rear young in the reedbeds at the Lakeside most years.



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8. Mallards and Gadwalls at Doncaster Lakeside

Mallards (*Anas Platyrhynchos*) are widespread and very easily seen at the Lakeside. The males are colourful and the females are shades of brown. It is the females that make the classic quacking sound, with the males making more of a low rasping noise.



Mallards eat water weeds and land plants, as well as insects and small fish, by day and night. They pair up, nest and rear young at the Lakeside, but the first sign of this is usually the fluffy ducklings appearing on the water with their mothers, apparently out of nowhere.

Some of the ducks on the Lake are the result of interbreeding between Mallards and white farmyard ducks. Gadwalls (*Anas Strepera*) are smaller than Mallards. The females are very similar to Mallard females, but with more delicate bills. The males have speckled or barred plumage that seems like a velvety grey from a distance. In 2016 a family of 21 gadwall ducklings hatched out and thrived under the care of their supermum.

9. Tufted Ducks and Pochards at Doncaster Lakeside



Tufted Ducks (*Aythya Fuligula*) are numerous at Lakeside, where they tend to form a large flock. Males have black and white plumage and females are mostly brown.

Although they seem to spend most of their time just bobbing about on the surface of the water, they do dive to the bottom of the lake for food. They eat small crustaceans, insects and larvae, as well as pondweed. Pochards (*Aythya Ferina*) appear at Lakeside from time to time and are noteworthy when seen, because they are an endangered species.

Males have grey plumage, with red heads and black chests. Females have grey brown plumage and brown heads.

They seem to sleep a lot floating on the surface of the water in the daytime, because they are night-time feeders. They eat water plants, insects, snails, tadpoles and small fish.

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10. Nearby Wildlife at Doncaster Lakeside

Rabbits, weasels, foxes and deer are present around the Lakeside.

Bats such as Pipistrelle, Noctule, Daubentons, Brandts and Natterers have been detected by local enthusiasts. Pied Wagtails roost at the Lakeside Outlet.

At dusk in late autumn and winter a starling murmuration can be observed by looking across the farmland towards Potteric Carr. The starlings gather to roost together for the night. They spend about half an hour gathering in larger and larger numbers, swirling around in the sky and a creating breathtaking spectacle. It is worth taking a look late on a clear dry afternoon.

11. Fish at Doncaster Lakeside

Koi carp are the most noticeable fish at Lakeside, because they are large and variously coloured in black, white and orange. There are various local stories about the presence of these fish, which are obviously not native. The most likely reason is people setting their koi carp free into the Lake, due to moving house.

There are native fish in the Lake, such as perch and roach. Again it is not obvious how they got into the water, because the Lake is (according to Doncaster Council) supplied by rainwater and groundwater, not by water courses. One theory is that the fish arrived from other lakes and water course as eggs on birds' feet.

In the spring and summer, huge numbers of tiny fish fry can be seen swimming just below the surface. This is why the Lakeside is popular with fishing birds such as Grebes and Cormorants.



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12. Spiders at Doncaster Lakeside

Under the road bridge dividing Lakeside there are lighting panels by both paths. Spiders have colonized these areas and they are a specialized type identified by a local scientist as *Larinioides Sclopetarius* (or 'Security Light' spider). They make dense webs over the lights to catch the millions of aquatic insects like mosquitoes and mayflies. The wind tunnel effect of the road bridge underpass sends plenty of prey, already attracted to the lights, through to be snared on the very tough webs.

13. Coots at Doncaster Lakeside

Coots (*Fulica Atra*) are always present in large numbers at Lakeside. They are larger than Moorhens and can be distinguished by white bill and forehead. Traditionally the phrase 'as bald as a coot' is supposed to refer to this appearance.

Coots feed on water plants and small water creatures. They nest and rear young every year at Lakeside. Their nests are untidy but effective, and they often weave debris such as litter into their arrangement.

Every year coots nest on the base of the fountain and are so programmed to do this that they will return and rebuild if disturbed.



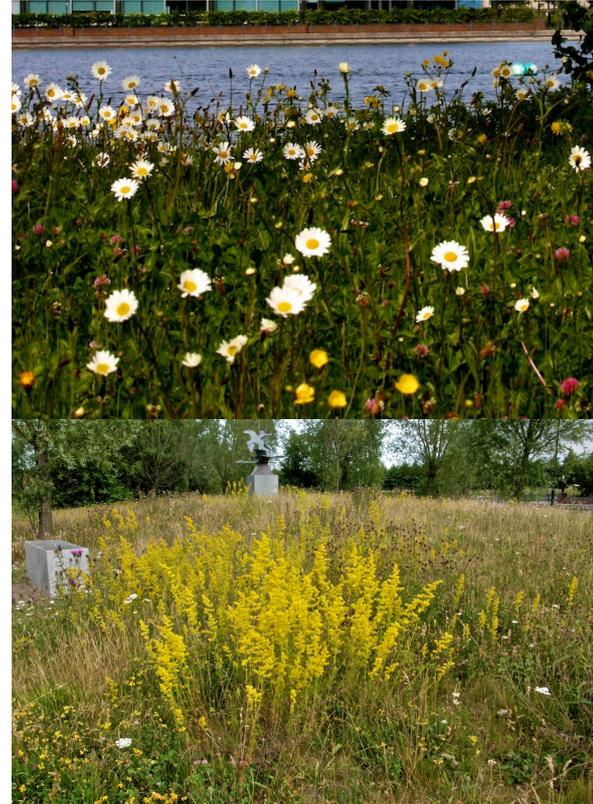
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14. Wildflowers at Doncaster Lakeside

The best place for wildflowers at Lakeside is on the islands, because these were originally sown as perennial wildflower meadows when the area was first developed.

Local enthusiasts conduct an annual survey of the islands and the hills, finding over 60 types, including bee orchids. Another type of orchid, the Broad-Leaved Helleborine is flourishing on the islands. It would not have been part of the meadow planting, so may have arrived in the soil of the root balls when trees were planted on the islands.

There is a wildflower identification board on the island, which concentrates on the meadow flowers.



15. Gulls at Doncaster Lakeside



Gulls are attracted to Lakeside, the most commonly seen being Black-headed Gulls (*Larus ridibundus*). In late winter and spring it has a dark brown hood, which fades to a dark spot behind the eye in summer and autumn. It is a lively, noisy bird which feeds on insects, worms, spiders, slugs and small fish. It is agile enough to snatch food on the wing and also tries to steal food from other birds, such as Grebes, as they surface with their catch. Black-headed Gulls gather in large numbers at dusk to roost on the water at Lakeside.

Other gulls visit the Lakeside too, including Herring Gull, Common Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Mediterranean Gull, Glaucous Gull, Caspian Gull, Iceland Gull.