



Shrewsbury Town Council, Riggs Hall,
The Library, Castle Gates, Shrewsbury, SY1 2AS



 @ShrewsburyTC  www.facebook.com/shrewsburytowncouncil



50 YEARS
RHS BRITAIN IN BLOOM
Champion of Champions 2014



Welcome to the Rea Brook Valley

The Rea Brook Valley is the largest, most visited nature reserve managed by Shrewsbury Town Council. Its status as a Local Nature Reserve is national recognition of its importance as a haven for wildlife and a place for people to enjoy. The valley is a green corridor from open countryside, right into the heart of the town. Early settlers, monks and farmers have shaped the landscape over hundreds of years. Remains of their activities are still visible along the brook.

There is a circular walk exploring the northern end of the reserve, starting from the Abbey Foregate car park. You can follow the 'Rea Brook Circular Walk' waymarkers with the Kingfisher on and the guide in this leaflet. This walk is about 3 miles, along generally level ground, although some areas may be muddy during winter. There are no stiles along the route, but there are several sets of steps. The rest of the site is accessible by following the Shropshire Way signs south of Sutton, leading out around the golf course and into Meole Brace.



Shrewsbury's hidden treasure

Grazing for conservation

Light grazing by cattle during the summer months helps to create a range of different conditions across the grasslands. Bare patches around drinking areas allow solitary bees and wasps to burrow, buttercups and hawkbit push through the lowered grass and dung beetles feast on the manure. This is mimicking what large wild animals such as aurochs would have done in Britain thousands of years ago.

Insect rich hay meadows

Other grasslands are managed by haymaking. This practice has been in existence for hundreds of years, and many of our threatened wildflowers depend on it. By cutting, drying and turning the grass at the right time of year, we allow the seed to return to the ground. The hay is used to feed the cattle during the winter.

Veteran trees

There are plenty of gnarled old trees to be found along the site. As well as the prominent trees growing out in the meadows, there are some stunning veterans hidden away in corners. Often the dead and decaying sections of these trees are harbouring the most wildlife. See if you can find the grand Oak tree at Meole Brace off Moneybrook Way which is around 400 years old. This means that it would have been a sapling at the time the English Civil War began!

Wild pools and ancient mill channels

As well as the brook itself, the various channels and pools have been retained and allowed to naturalise, providing a vital refuge for frogs, newts and toads. By carrying out careful management of these areas, we can ensure that they do not dry out or fill up with silt.

Traditional management

By reusing materials generated by our management, we can reduce our carbon and waste footprint. Rods of hazel produced by coppicing are used to bind newly laid hedges, chipped willow stems are laid on the footpaths to prevent them becoming muddy and slabs of hardwood are milled from fallen trees after storms.

Recreation

Volunteer work parties help us with much of our management work and are a great way for people to get outside and keep fit. As the site is within walking distance of many schools and colleges it is well used by play and study groups. As well as being popular with local dog walkers, the long distance Shropshire Way runs along the site, bringing hikers from further afield. With the purchase of a permit, fishing is allowed along the brook and provides the perfect opportunity for wildlife watching.



What to look out for

Whilst there are literally thousands of plants, animals, and fungi to be found in the Rea Brook Valley, here are a few things to look out for:

Kingfisher

A bright blue and orange bird that will usually announce their arrival with a high pitched whistle before whizzing past along the route of the brook. If you are lucky, they may even land on a branch hanging over the water and give you a display of expert fishing!

Grayling

Known as 'The Lady of the Stream' because of its brightly coloured dorsal fin, this large fish is another indicator of clean water quality.

Beefly

This hairy insect flicks its eggs into the burrows of bees and wasps, so that their larvae can feed on the host's eggs.

Otter

Historic pollution had damaged the ecosystem of the brook, but improvements upstream in recent years have allowed fish diversity and numbers to improve. This large mammal has taken advantage of this and colonised the brook from the connection with the river Severn.

Dipper

Absent for much of the 2000s, this is another bird that has returned, likely as a result of improving water quality. They get their name from their constant bobbing motion, before darting under the water to feed on invertebrates in fast flowing sections of the brook.

White magpie

This unusual bird has been seen many times in recent years around the Sutton area of the site and has become something of a celebrity! It has a condition known as 'leucism' which disrupts the production of colour pigments in feathers.

Toothwort

An uncommon plant that does not have any green leaves, instead taking its food from the roots of trees. It can be found at the Meole Brace end of the site, in pink flowering groups during spring.

Knapweed

A favourite of pollinating insects, this tall purple flower thrives in our hay meadows and pastures, and is one of the later plants to go to seed.