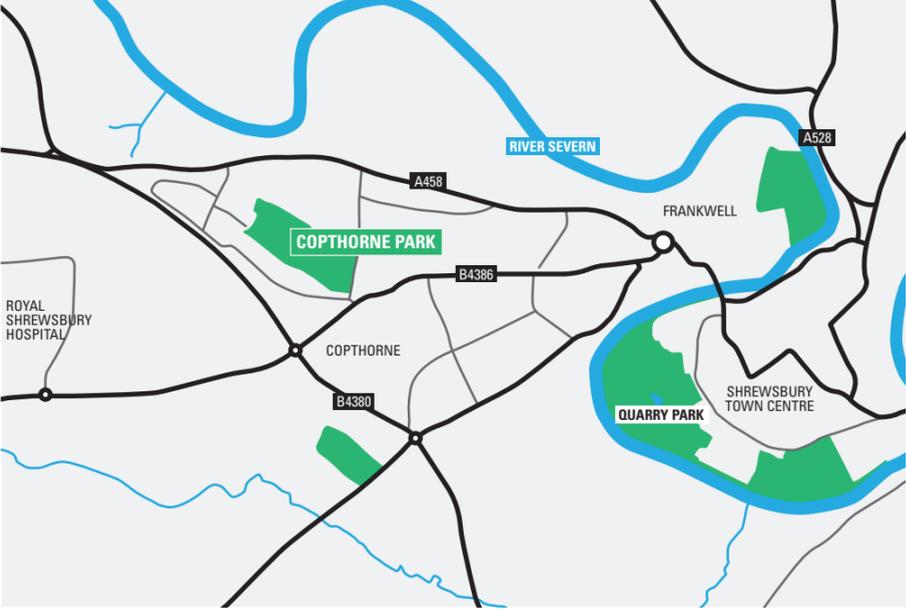


Shrewsbury   
in Bloom  
Copthorne Park



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

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## Welcome to Copthorne Park

Copthorne Park is a nature reserve in the west of Shrewsbury, about 6 hectares in size. Despite being surrounded by a housing estate, it provides a home for a variety of wildlife and a place for people to get close to nature. Shrewsbury Town Council's Countryside Unit manages the site using traditional methods, giving opportunities for volunteering and community involvement.

The depression that the park lies in was formed around 10,000 years ago, at the end of the last ice age. As ice sheets melted, they left huge blocks of ice on low areas which melted more slowly and made deeper holes filled with peat and water. These are known as 'kettle holes' and there are a number of others across Shrewsbury. The park was taken over by the Borough Council in 1945, and designated as a Countryside Site in 1991, in recognition of its importance to wildlife.

# Features of Copthorne Park

## Perennial Meadows

There are three perennial meadows within the park, the most diverse of which is on the east side of the park. This grassland has provided donor seed to projects for the Shropshire Wildlife Trust, as well as other council nature reserves. July is the best time to see the meadows, with the flowers in bloom and the tips of the grasses buzzing with bees and butterflies. The meadows are managed by taking a hay cut once the flowers have set seed. This removes nutrients from the ground, which hampers weed growth. The hay is used to feed cattle over the winter, who come out to graze our other nature reserves in the summer months.

## Annual Meadows

A small area off Richmond Drive has been sown with cornfield annual flowers, which provide a stunning and constantly changing display over the summer. Unlike the perennial meadows, they thrive on disturbed ground and are more competitive with weeds. Because of this, instead of making hay, we rotovate the ground each autumn to allow the seeds to get back into the soil. After several years, species such as corncockle become dominant and create an unbalanced display, so we start the process again by adding seed of other species such as corn chamomile and poppy when we rotovate.

## Pools

There are several permanent and seasonal pools in the park, linked together with wet ditches. These provide a home for many species of invertebrate and amphibian. Because of their small size, they are vulnerable to drying out over time. Willow trees suck up water from their roots, and drop leaves into the pools during autumn, which shallows them as the leaves sink and rot. To prevent this, we carry out coppicing of the trees on the pool edges.

## Coppice

Coppicing is the ancient method of cutting trees near to the ground, but allowing them to regrow. Traditionally this was done to provide animal feed, firewood and building materials. Coppicing on a rotation meant that there were always stems available at the required size for different jobs, and created a mosaic of different habitats. Much of our native wildlife adapted to this type management over hundreds of years, until it suddenly disappeared in the 1900s. The material that we cut at Copthorne Park is laid into 'dead hedges' which make excellent homes for birds.

## Scrub

The bramble patches on the margins of the meadows provide cover for many birds, as well as foraging opportunities. By cutting some of these every few years, we ensure that they do not turn into wooded areas.

## Wet Woodland

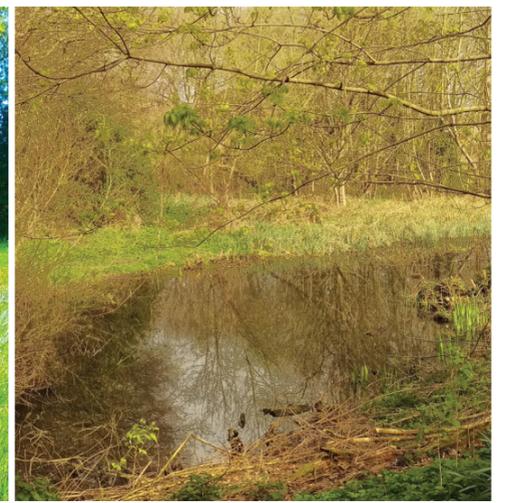
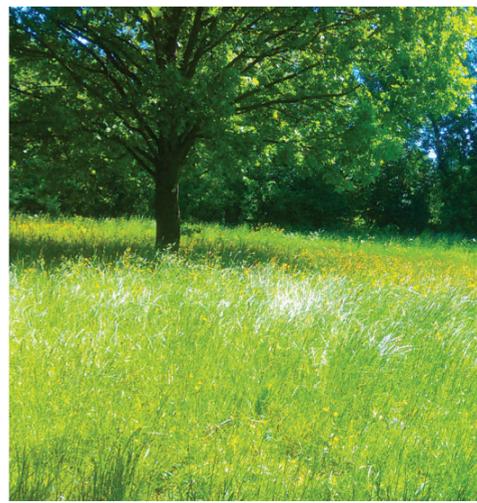
Despite efforts to open up areas of water to sunlight, we do allow some areas to become wet woodland. Filled with decaying timber and rotten leaves, oxygen levels in the water are low, providing a niche for some unusual invertebrates.

## Mature Trees

There are several notable mature trees within the park. Filled with cavities and crevices, they make ideal nesting sites for birds and small mammals. We sometimes need to carry out work in the canopy when these trees are near to footpaths.

## Dead Wood

Standing and fallen deadwood is probably the most overlooked wildlife feature in the British countryside. Supporting a huge variety of fungus, invertebrates, mosses and more, we always allow it to stay in situ wherever safe.



## Recreation

The site is popular with dog walkers, joggers and anyone just wanting to enjoy a peaceful walk. The local schools and nurseries use the park for nature education, and the council has held events including pond dipping and bug hunts in recent years. Community involvement is encouraged, and the countryside unit's weekly volunteer party can often be found working at Copthorne Park. This year they have been joined by adults with disabilities from a local day centre, the Army Reserves and several groups from Shrewsbury College. Tasks have included laying woodchip on muddy sections of the path, clearing invasive weed from the pond, and helping with our coppicing. The local residents also value the park, and usually clear up any litter that appears within a few hours.

## Wildlife

### Great Crested Newts

These striking amphibians use the pools to breed during the spring months before hibernating on land within the dead wood piles during winter. They are rarely seen during daylight, so surveys to monitor their numbers are carried out by torchlight.

### Water Voles

Sadly, these rare mammals have not been recorded within the park for the last few years, although the habitat remains suitable. Often revealing themselves with a loud 'plop' as they enter the water, they live in bankside burrows and feed on vegetation.

### Bullfinch

These large finches are often heard calling softly in the blackthorn scrub. Their population has declined sharply since the 1960's.

### Water Scorpion

An underwater predator that hides amongst dead leaves awaiting its prey. It is large and fierce enough to catch small fish.

### Yellow Rattle

This attractive wildflower plays an important role in the meadows of the park. It is parasitic on grasses, which suppresses their growth and gives space for many other wildflowers to grow.

### Alder

Some of the largest and most interesting trees at the site are Alders. Usually hidden amongst the wet woodland at the western end of the site, they thrive in the damp conditions.

