

ROWLEY WOOD TRAIL

The Stop, look and listen trail

So you are standing by a post in Rowley Wood. They are numbered 1-10 .

Enjoy the posts in any order.



At each post

Look around you, look high and look low, what can you see ?

Can you see trees?

Can you see low growing plants?

Can you see water?

Can you see something unusual?

Now stand still and listen, what can you hear ?

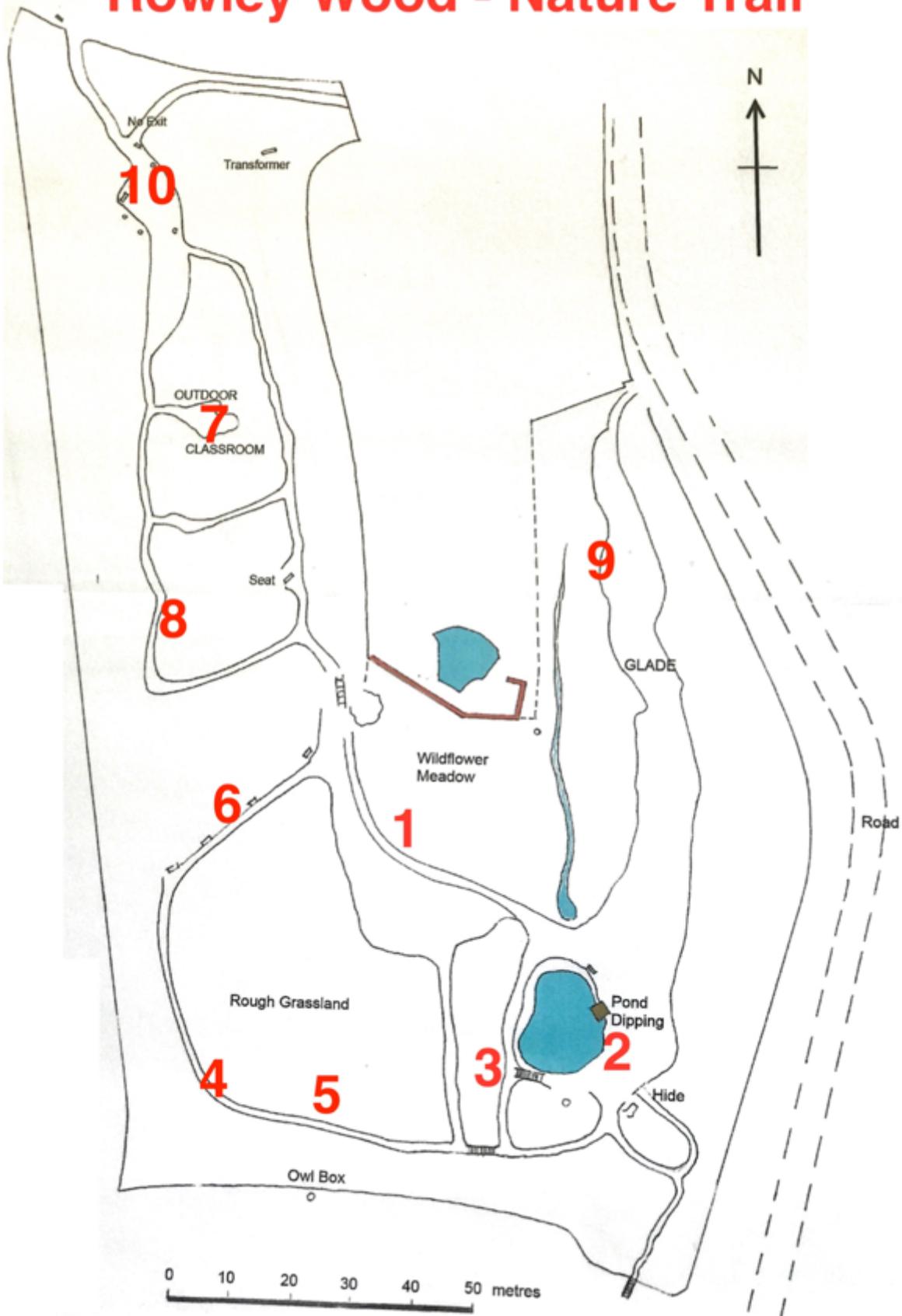
Can you hear the traffic on the road?

Can you hear bird song?

Can you hear an aeroplane?

Can you hear something unusual?

Rowley Wood - Nature Trail



1/ The Wildflower Meadow

We are looking over the wildflower meadow where the vegetation is low and there are no trees producing shade.

We don't walk over this area as it contains many very special wild flowers living happily among the grasses. The wildflowers all have rather lovely names and it's



great fun looking closely and trying to identify all the different flowers. Feel free to look closely and draw what you see.

Perhaps you will find the plant name later but please don't pick the flowers.

The grasses don't seem to have bright flowers but they do have very beautiful soft seed heads. Pick a seed head to see how

soft and beautiful they are.

Insects and our pollinator friends love wildflower meadows. How many flying insects can you see?

The yellow flowers at this time of the year by the path are called Yellow Rattle, yes, the seed pods really do rattle in the wind

The very tall plants with yellow flowers growing in our meadow are called Elecampane.

The flowers in the meadow produce seeds which grow to produce more of the same lovely flowers for next year.



These same wildflowers are called 'weeds' when they grow in our gardens at home. In the wild we treasure them.

2/ The Pond

We are looking over the pond which is the lowest part of the site. When it rains the water drains down to the pond creating very moist conditions for living things. Some fifteen years ago we dug a great big hole in the ground and lined it with clay. Slowly we watched for several days as the pond filled up. It looked very new and



clean but soon nature took over and many living things decided to make our pond their home. Nature just took over.

Around the edges are marginal plants which like to have their roots in damp soil. The marsh zone, with Willow Herb and Marsh Marigold. Can you identify them?

Then in the shallow pond water, the swamp zone, we find reeds and rushes and yellow iris. What shape leaves do these plants display? Which birds like to nest in this thick cover?

Then in the very deep water we see plants which float, the tiny leaves are on the surface for sunlight with roots absorbing nutrients from the water. Go onto the dipping platform to have a closer look. How many Water Lilly flowers can you count?

Have you been pond dipping to find the little creatures that live in the water?

Stand quietly by the edge of the pond in the summer sunshine and you may well see a dragon fly or a damsel fly. They lay their eggs on the marginal plants and more of these beautiful creatures can be enjoyed next year.

Lots of mammals come to the pond for a drink when all is quiet. Can you find their tracks?

Why don't we want fish in the pond?

When the pond fills up it overflows into our wetland area.



3/ Wetland Area

We are surrounded by very tall vegetation, all the plants are very close together, each trying to be the tallest to dominate and get the sunlight. The ground is very boggy. Be careful where you tread.



Close to the ground there are lots of places for little creatures to hide.

To help us through the boggiest parts we have built a board walk. What sort of wood is it made of?

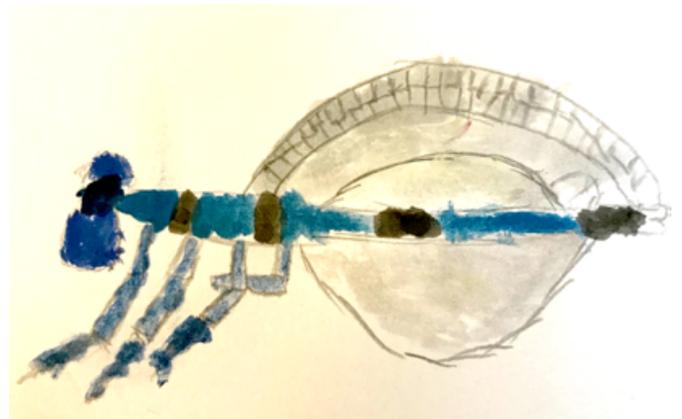
These are all plants that love damp conditions with full sunlight. Can you identify Willow-herb and Hemp Agrimony.

These plants keep the 'bog' fresh and sweet by producing oxygen from their roots as well as from

their leaves.

Some low growing trees thrive close in these damp conditions. The ones you see are fast growing Goat Willow.

I hope you didn't get muddy feet !



4/ Rough Meadow

You are looking over an area of dry rough meadow with the tall grass seed heads swaying in the breeze. Ideal habitat for rodents and reptiles.

The rodents build well camouflaged nests near the ground. We don't try to find the nests.



How many rodents do you know ?

How many reptiles do you know ?

We do not cut or disturb the vegetation in this wild area but we do try to control 'invading species'. We like the vegetation mixed, thick and matted. We restrain the dominant brambles into clumps which give the creatures a hiding place from their enemies.

Which creatures love to catch rodents ?

Which creatures love to catch reptiles ?

We do not want tall trees in the area but somehow young oak trees keep appearing. I wonder which creature buries the acorns in our rough meadow.



5/ Birds you may see.

Looking carefully at the big oak tree on the boundary you may be able to make out a barn owl box. Yes we put the box high up on this tree, in the hope that a barn owl would choose to make it home.



One year, we watched as the parents fed their young until they eventually fledged and flew off to find their own home. We kept our distance. Only special trained naturalists are allowed near the owl box. No barn owls chose to make our barn owl box 'home' this year.

Barn owls are now rare. Traditionally they nested in nooks and crannies in old farm barns and kept the rodent

population down. The barns all got smartened up and so now we make special boxes for the barn owls.

Stay and be quiet. Look up to the sky, you may well see a red kite circling above.

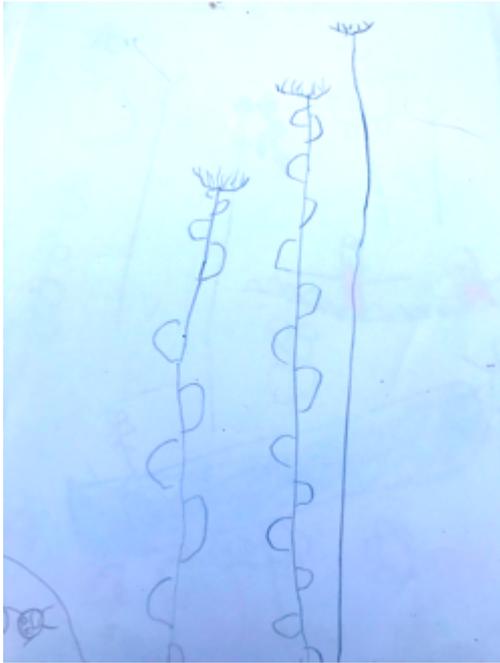
They have amazing eye sight and can spot their next meal on the ground below.

What other birds can you see or hear ?



6/ Reptile tins

Under this tin you may well find a slow worm or even a harmless grass snake. Be prepared. Lift the tin carefully and look. When disturbed the reptiles will usually retreat to the vegetation away from you. Please, please replace the tin slowly and carefully.



Reptiles are cold blooded and like to gather under the warm tins. This bank faces South in full sun, we call it our reptile bank. It is their home, we are privileged visitors. Further along to the side of the steps there is a habitat pile. This is built of piled vegetation from our wildflower meadow and topped up when we cut the wildflower meadow each

year. Left undisturbed this habitat pile provides a warm winter hibernation home for our reptile friends.

On the other side of the steps rotting logs provide a popular basking place for lizards to warm up in the sunshine. Look carefully they are well disguised.

Do lizards hibernate in the winter ?



7/ Outdoor classroom

Possibly this area should be called our meditation area. Just sit quietly on a log and enjoy the peace and tranquillity that this secret place provides. Think about the natural world and what you have already seen in Rowley Wood.

The bushes that provide the shade also provide a generous crop of wild cherry plums. A really lovely white blossom in March is followed in July by yellow or red cherry plums hanging from the branches. Delicious for us to eat and the birds don't seem to like them.

How ripe are the fruits today?

We don't allow fires and we don't do clearing up in Rowley Wood, everything is left to rot down and return to nature. It's a most wonderful cycle of life

Cherry plum bushes produce a low canopy which is what makes this place so cosy and secret. The bushes produce multiple trunks which are very tempting to climb. The stinging nettles are not quite so tempting if you fall off.



8/

Standing deadwood

As we look deep into the woodland we see two dead trees. They are dead cherry trees. Yes this used to be a cherry orchard when the cherries were gathered and taken to London by train. That was all a long time ago.

Cherry trees don't live forever. They thrive, produce lots of cherries each year and then slowly over a period of several years they slowly lose the will to live and die.

We treasure standing deadwood. The knurled trunk and branches play host and provide a home for many living things.

Bats find crevasses to shelter in. Insects live on the decaying wood providing food for woodpeckers and other birds. A dead tree is alive with other life.

Fungus thrives on the dead wood

We resist the urge to push the standing deadwood to the ground and we resist the urge to tidy up.

We let nature take its course.

Between the dead cherry trees we have planted a new young cherry tree which is thriving. Even in winter dead trees and live trees are easy to tell apart.

Can you find other dead trees ?

The cycle of nature continues.



9/ Under the trees

Look up, look around, we planted these trees about fifteen years ago. They were tiny whips no more than half a metre high.



We planted them close enough in the hope that they would form a woodland canopy above.

How far apart are the tree trunks ?

The green leaves high up on the trees get the full sunlight in the canopy above but the woodland floor is shaded out supporting very few plants. Where the canopy is not yet complete some plants take their chance and struggle to thrive with the very reduced sun light.

Enjoy the dappled sun light

beneath the canopy.

In winter it is a different story. The sunlight reaches the woodland floor when there are no leaves on the trees. This provides an opportunity for our snow drops and blue bells to complete their yearly display. They thrive on the woodland floor in spring before the trees come into leaf and then hide below ground ready for next year.

In autumn the leaves from the trees fall and enrich the woodland floor.

The dryer conditions in this part of Rowley Wood suit ash, oak, wild cherry, holly and field maple and more.

Nearly all the trees in Rowley wood are deciduous – they loose their leaves in winter. Which trees in Rowley Wood are evergreen and keep their leaves in the winter?



10/

Scattered Orchard

You are in the glade at the top of the old cherry orchard. In keeping with the orchard theme, with help from The Dedham Vale Project Team, we have planted several new fruit trees. Our scattered orchard.

The trees you see at the edge of the glade are all traditional varieties, fruit trees that would have been familiar on the landscape and in the hedge rows years ago. They will produce fruit, it may not be the biggest and the best but the flavour can be enjoyed in the certain

knowledge that this fruit is growing naturally without the aid of fertilizers or insecticides. Enjoy !

These are 'standard trees' meaning they grow tall on straight trunks. To help the roots develop these trees need support against wind damage for their first few years. Rabbits love to eat the new tender bark around newly planted trees. You will see rabbit guards around the base of the trunks.

We try to keep the vegetation low around these trees to reduce

competition.

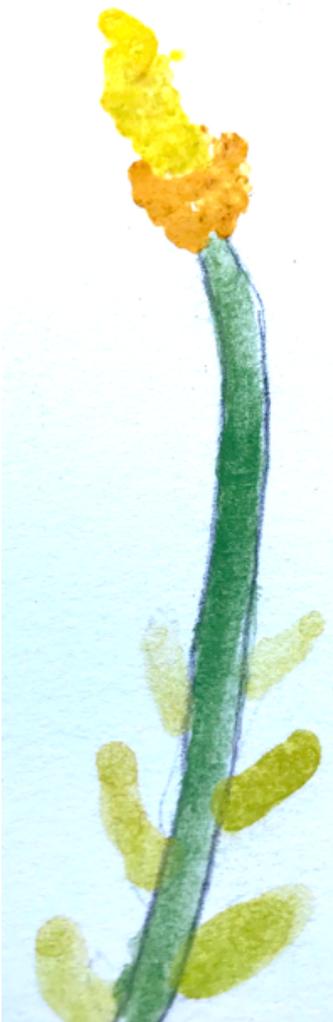
How many fruit trees can you find around the glade ?

Can you recognize the different fruits ?

Standing alone further down in the glade a cherry tree spreads its branches. This is a

rather special Polstead Black cherry which we believe was once common in this area and is the variety that was planted in the original Cherry Wood orchard.

This year for the first time we tasted the cherries before the birds ate all the rest.



Produced by Leavenheath, Polstead and Stoke by Nayland Community Woodland Group in conjunction with Stoke by Nayland C of E Primary School.

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