

Location

From Melksham town centre take the Riverside Walk, which runs between the River Avon and the Sainsbury's supermarket car park. The path leads directly into the nature reserve through gates. Grid ref ST 901 637.

Nearest public telephone: Next to Post Office in Church Street

Nearest hospital casualty units: Are in Trowbridge and Chippenham

Nearest public toilets: At the cemetery

Wardens: Gill and Ian Cardy, Caroline and David Williams

If you would like to help look after Conigre Mead come along on the morning of the third Saturday of each month.

Dogs are allowed but should be kept on a lead to reduce disturbance to wildlife.



Flowering rush



Young kingfisher



About Wiltshire Wildlife Trust

Our vision is to create a county rich in wildlife and to help people live sustainable lifestyles that protect the environment for the benefit of everyone.

We have more than 18,000 members, look after over 40 nature reserves, are supported by hundreds of volunteers, and work with local communities, schools, businesses and public bodies to achieve our aims. To do all this we rely on the support of our members.

If you would like to join us, or to find out about how you can help the environment, please visit www.wiltshirewildlife.org, 'like' us on [facebook.com/WiltsWild](https://www.facebook.com/WiltsWild) and follow @WiltsWildlife on Twitter. You can also call us on (01380) 725670, or write to us at: Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, Elm Tree Court, Long Street, Devizes, Wiltshire SN10 1NJ.

Front cover photo: Red campion

All photos by Gill Cardy

Registered Charity No. 266202

This leaflet was produced with funding from



Wiltshire Wildlife Trust

A sustainable future for wildlife and people

Nature reserves

Conigre Mead



Conigre Mead nature reserve

Conigre Mead was bought by local people and given as a nature reserve to Wiltshire Wildlife Trust in 1989. At that time this triangular-shaped meadow, which is bordered by the Bristol Avon, contained a magnificent crack willow, but otherwise consisted mostly of rough grass.

Over the intervening years volunteers have worked hard to turn it into a gorgeous little natural space, digging ponds, clearing scrub and planting trees and wildflowers to attract more wildlife.

Situated a stone's throw from Melksham's busy Sainsbury's car park and the peaceful cemetery belonging to St Michael's Church, this three-acre reserve is accessible to and enjoyed by people of all ages. The land sometimes floods in winter but new all-weather paths have been installed to cope with this.

History

Because it is on a flood plain the meadow has only ever really been used for summer grazing. The name 'conigre' refers to coney-garth or enclosed rabbit warren, which is thought to be a medieval creation by the manorial lord at Amesbury Abbey but it is unlikely the meadow was part of the conigre itself.

Some or all of the meadow may have been enclosed during the 17th century to become part of Conigre Farm, which was attached to the Melksham House

estate. In 1920 the farm was sold to a local bank manager, who in the same year sold it on to Avon Rubber.

In 1971-72 the western relief road was built across the River Avon and forms the western boundary of the reserve.

Wildlife

In spring and summer this hidden gem is full of meadow cranesbill, red campion and meadowsweet. Primroses and cowslips are some of the first flowers to join them, followed by knapweed, purple loosestrife and willowherb.

Teasels provide nectar for butterflies, particularly brimstones in the spring and tortoiseshells in the summer. Small skipper butterflies and occasional common blues are also found.

Conigre Mead has a wealth of other insect life too. At least 12 species of dragonflies and damselflies can be seen through the summer, and some are even visible as late as November on a sunny day. The reserve is home to a large population of the uncommon white-legged damselfly and the scarce chaser dragonfly. In the summer the grass is alive with grasshoppers and crickets.

Three ponds provide homes and breeding waters for newts and frogs.

Please send all wildlife sightings to Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Records Centre www.wsbrc.org.uk or phone (01380) 725670.



Many birds use the reserve. You can sometimes see the blue streak of the kingfisher and spot a grey heron standing sentinel on the banks along with its close cousin, the little egret. Other migrating wading birds, such as the common sandpiper stop off on their journeys and regular visitors include moorhens, mallards, mute swans, greenfinches, goldfinches, kingfishers and kestrels.

A hidden world of runs and tunnels in the grass are used by wood mice, bank voles and common shrews to get about unseen. The rare water shrew is found here too. Everyday it has to eat its own body weight in juicy snails, water shrimps, worms and spiders. Secretive grass snakes and slow worms warm themselves on sunny days.

Pipistrelle bats and Daubenton's bats can be seen on summer nights – mainly along the river. The pipistrelle, weighing as little as a two pence piece, can eat over 3,000 biting midges in a night!

Meadow cranesbill



Purple loosestrife



White-legged damselfly



Meadow grasshopper



Grey heron

