

Welcome to the Lower Test Valley Nature Reserves

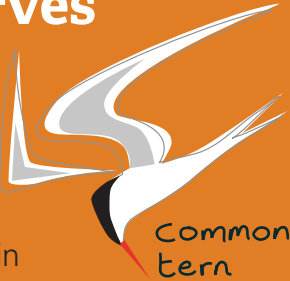
Testwood Lakes

is a mixture of open water, grassland and woodland on the edge of Totton. Steeped in Bronze Age history, it forms part of the internationally important Test Valley floodplain. The lakes support large numbers of overwintering wildfowl and waders, which can be viewed from the viewing screens and bird hides. In summer the grassland is a blaze of colour with wildflowers.

Lower Test is 400 acres (162 hectares) of saltmarsh, reedbed, marsh and meadows. The regular saltwater flooding protects the grasslands from freezing in cold winters, attracting huge numbers of feeding wildfowl such as wigeon and teal.

The reserve is also very rich in wild flowers with over 450 species recorded, including southern marsh and green-winged orchids.

Owned by the Barker Mills Estate and managed by Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, it is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).



Common tern

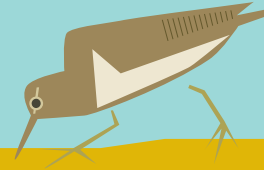


banded demoiselle

How to find us

Exit M27 at Junction 2, take A326 Fawley/Totton road, take the first exit to Totton (A36) and proceed towards Totton. At the first roundabout turn left into Brunel Road. Testwood Lakes is situated 300m down on the left hand side. This is the start of the trail.

For more information, please call: **023 8066 7929** or visit **www.hiwwt.org.uk**



Common sandpiper



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Testwood Lakes nature reserve is managed by Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust in partnership with Southern Water.

www.hiwwt.org.uk

Front cover image Grey heron © Darin Smith

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Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust

Lower Test Valley Self Guided Trail



Distance approx. 5 miles (8km)
Time: allow 2.5 – 3.5 hours

Protecting wildlife, inspiring people

Points of interest

A Testwood Lakes Centre: a great place to learn about wildlife, the Centre is open to the public most weekdays and Sunday afternoons staffed by volunteers. Car parks are open every day between 8am-4pm (winter) and 8am-5pm (summer).

B Testwood Lake: this is the largest of the 4 lakes, formerly gravel pits, which were last worked in 2001. Its banks have been planted with wetland species to provide nesting sites, food and winter shelter for birds such as tufted duck, coot and great crested grebe.



C Nature Conservation area: look through the viewing screens to see Meadow Lake and the Scrapes, an area of ridges and ditches, created to attract nesting waders including lapwing, oystercatcher and little ringed plover.

D River Blackwater: this tributary of the River Test is lined with mature alder trees, home to both great and lesser spotted woodpecker. In winter alder cones attract flocks of siskins and redpolls. In summer look out for both the banded and beautiful demoiselles.



E River Test at Nursling Mill:

This former grain mill stopped working in 1960. Beneath it is the River Test, a classic chalk stream with clear, fast-flowing water. The river is rich in insect life and attracts trout, grey wagtail and kingfisher.



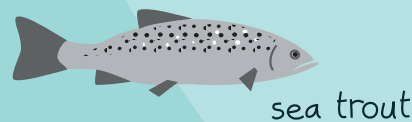
The old hedgerows along the lane are made up of at least 10 different species of tree and shrub. In autumn they are rich with berries providing an important food source for birds and small mammals. Can you find 10? Hawthorn, hazel, field maple, oak, elder, spindle, dogwood, blackthorn, gorse and ash.



F Lower Test Meadows: in spring look for wild flowers such as cuckoo flower, lesser spearwort, meadowsweet and ragged robin. In winter these fields are waterlogged and you can make out the pattern of ridges and furrows, a remnant of the old water meadow system which once operated here. Part of the old Southampton to Andover Canal, completed in 1796, can be glimpsed on the left.



G River Test: the river here becomes slower and deeper as it starts meandering across the nature reserve on its journey towards the estuary. This is the highest tidal reach of the river.



H Redbed: Redbridge can be seen to the south. Formerly 'reedbridge', it got its name as it overlooked one of the largest reedbeds on the south coast. The tall reeds provide ideal breeding grounds for large numbers of reed, sedge and Cetti's warblers. Listen out for their distinctive territorial singing in spring. The reedbed is also an important autumn roost site for swallows and sand martins preparing for migration.

I Coastal grasslands: Salt-tolerant plants such as sea aster grow in these ditches. Their fleshy leaves are able to store water to counteract the salt levels in the brackish tidal water. Signs of water vole and otter can be found here.

From the boardwalk there are often good views of little egret hunting in wet pools, noisy stonechats perched on brambles, and the pinkish plumage of water pipits (particularly in spring). In summer black-tailed skimmer and common darter dragonflies are often seen basking on the boardwalk.



J Testwood Park: this is a much drier area of grassland than Lower Test nature reserve. This enables it to be grazed in winter, resulting in a tall summer meadow rich in insects, particularly meadow brown and skipper butterflies. The adjacent Wetrans Copse is carpeted with bluebells in spring.

Lower Test Valley Self-guided Trail

Distance approx. 5 miles (8km)
Time: allow 2.5 – 3.5 hours

Getting around

Testwood Lakes: paths are surfaced and relatively flat but there is one steep slope on the north and south side of the main lake. There are benches at regular intervals. If you have a large buggy or wheelchair you may need a RADAR key for the gates (available from the Centre by arrangement). Please note some paths regularly flood during winter.

Lower Test and adjacent areas: paths are generally unsurfaced and there are a number of stiles, kissing gates, stepping stones and boardwalks to cross. There are no benches or toilet facilities after leaving Testwood Lakes nature reserve.

Dogs

Testwood Lakes: responsible dog walking is permitted around Testwood and Little Testwood Lakes. Dogs are not permitted around the Testwood Lakes Centre or in the Nature Conservation Areas.

Lower Test: due to breeding and over-wintering birds here, dogs are only permitted on the Test Way footpath and must be under close control. Responsible dog walking is permitted in Testwood Park.

Tides

Lower Test nature reserve is tidal and footpaths and boardwalks regularly flood at high tide. Always check the tide timetables before starting out on a long walk.



Walking the trail

- ① Starting from Testwood Lakes Centre, take the gravel path down towards Testwood Lake, following the path around its northern side.
- ② Continue along the path adjacent to the River Blackwater (NB. path regularly floods in winter).
- ③ Leaving Testwood Lakes, cross the Blackwater River over the footbridge and continue along the footpath over the River Test, to a stile at Nursling Mill.
- ④ Leaving the Mill, follow the road for half a mile (1km) along Mill Lane.
- ⑤ Just past the left turn (signposted on right 'Lee & Romsey') cross the white road bridge and enter Lower Test nature reserve via the kissing gate on right. This path is part of the long distance 'Test Way' which runs for 44 miles from Inkpen Beacon in Berkshire to Eling.
- ⑥ Continue along the Test Way, turning right at the first kissing gate next to the railway crossing, until you cross the River Test.
- ⑦ Follow the path turning left through the next gate, and after 200m join the start of the boardwalk which crosses the southern, tidal half of the reserve.
- ⑧ At the end of the boardwalk leave Lower Test nature reserve via the kissing gate.
- ⑨ Turn right over the bridge to follow the lane past the Fishing Cottage. Walk along the edge of a wood formerly part of the ornamental gardens of Great Testwood House.
- ⑩ Enter Testwood Park at the first kissing gate on the right. Bear right immediately through a second gate and walk diagonally across the field to a corner, on the edge of Wetrans Copse.
- ⑪ Follow the informal path to the right, through Wetrans Copse, until the edge of Brunel Road.
- ⑫ Continue along the road and at the junction with Nutsey Close, look for a footpath sign on the right. Take this path over a stile crossing the River Blackwater. Walk diagonally across two fields until the next stile, turning left to rejoin the path leading back into Testwood Lakes near the pumping station.