

Oughtonhead Common



Oughtonhead Common

HITCHIN



Volunteering Opportunities:

The **Friends of Oughtonhead Common** get together regularly to carry out conservation tasks to: keep the site in the best condition, attract a diversity of wildlife and make it welcoming for visitors. Typical management tasks includes:

- Coppicing scrub to encourage re-growth and add to diversity of habitat
- Hedgelaying and hedgerow planting
- Wet ditch and river bank maintenance
- Gate and seat installation
- Path clearance



Why Volunteer?

- Help maintain & improve the nature reserve
- Learn new skills
- Meet like-minded people

Contact CMS for more information

How to get there



Produced by Fitzpatrick Woolmer Design - 01634 711 771

By Road: From the centre of Hitchin follow the A600 towards Bedford. Approximately 1 mile from the town centre turn left into Burford Way which runs into Swinburne Ave. Parking is available at Swinburne Ave playing fields car park. Access also available to the site via Redhill Rd/Oughtonhead Lane but parking is limited.

By Public Transport: Nearest bus stops are on Bedford Rd and Burford Way/Swinburne Ave. For bus service details phone the Hertfordshire Traveline on 0870 608 2608.

The Countryside Management Service (CMS) works with communities in Hertfordshire to help them care for and enjoy the environment. For more information contact us at: The Old Dairy, Bedford Road, Ickleford, Hitchin, Herts SG5 3RR. e-mail: north.cms@hertscc.gov.uk

www.hertsdirect.org/CMS

Tel: 01462 459395



Local Nature Reserve

Unwind in the tranquillity of this ancient grazing Common within 2 miles of the centre of Hitchin



Enjoy a choice of River and Commons walks. Extensive surfaced paths suitable for wheelchair users and the less mobile. Footpath links with Hambridge and Icknield Ways and the Chilterns.

Welcome to Oughtonhead Common Local Nature Reserve.

The site, to the west of Hitchin (see directions map), comprises the **Grazing Common** and the **River Oughton** running along its northern edge.

- A surfaced path follows the river and provides the **River Walk**.
- The **Commons Walk** follows a grassy path around the edge of the Common (see centre map page for full description of these walks).

What you might see in different parts of the site:



The River: The clear waters arise from chalk springs running out of the Chiltern Hills to the west. The river has a rich plant community which

thrives in the pure water. Summer flowering and one of the most attractive is **Stream Water Crowfoot**, a relative of the buttercup. Woven fences have been erected in some places along the river bank to protect these plants, which can easily be damaged by dogs. At any time of the year, if you are quiet, you may see a flash of turquoise as a **Kingfisher** darts by.



The Reed and Sedge Beds: These are permanently wet areas, except in the driest of summers. **Frogs** may start mating as early as February but by March frog spawn and hatched tadpoles will be present. In summer they are alive with bird activity with **Reed** and **Sedge Warblers** nesting here.



Wet Grassland and Wet Ditches: These wet areas are what most of the Common used to be like. Plants, like the delicate **Ladies Smock** flowering in early spring and the **Southern Marsh Orchid** flowering in early summer, prefer these wetter areas. In summer you may see various species of **Dragonfly** and **Damselfly** and the colourful **Burnet Moth** which often feeds on the flowers of **Marsh Thistle**. Throughout the year you should see **English Longhorn** cattle grazing in the grassland.

Dry Grassland: In winter, large flocks of **Finches** feed on seed in the grassland and adjacent farmland. In summer, wildflowers attract many grassland species of butterfly such as **Meadow Brown** and **Ringlet** and you may hear a **Green Woodpecker** with its unmistakable "yaffle".

Photos courtesy of Terry Caver, Gert Ellstrom, Phil Lumley, Nick Upton and N. Herts Museum Service.

Woodland: Trees around the site and woodland to the north of the river are home to many birds. In early spring the **Chiffchaff**, a bird that sings its name, will be heard setting up its territory and **Great Spotted Woodpecker** can often be seen or heard in the tops of trees drumming for insects.

Hedgerows and Bushes: Mainly around the edge of the Common, these provide important food and shelter for wildlife. In spring **Blackthorn**, **Hawthorn** and **Elder** provide a profusion of white blossom to be followed by late summer and autumn fruit. Along with **Buckhorn** and **Ivy** berries, these attract many winter birds to the Common including **Fieldfare** and **Redwing**. In early spring, bright yellow **Lesser Celandine** flowers under the bare bushes taking advantage of plentiful sunlight. Spring butterflies include **Orange Tip**, the yellow **Brimstone** and **Speckled Wood** which prefers the dappled shade around the Common's edges.

