

Doorstep Walks

A Closer Look Guide

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Doorstep Walk 4 – A Wildlife Walk for the Family

By Anna Outlaw

Ever wanted to know more about the wildlife you've seen on your walk? The Wildlife Walk will tell you what to look out for and contains fascinating wildlife facts.

1. The lake near the visitor centre is a good place to see and feed ducks. Ducks fall into two groups –dabbling ducks and diving ducks. Dabbling ducks get their food by dabbling with their beaks just below the water surface. They eat mainly small insects, plants, and seeds. Diving ducks dive under the water in search of food. They eat insects, plants seeds, snails and small fish. Can you spot the two groups of ducks on the lake?

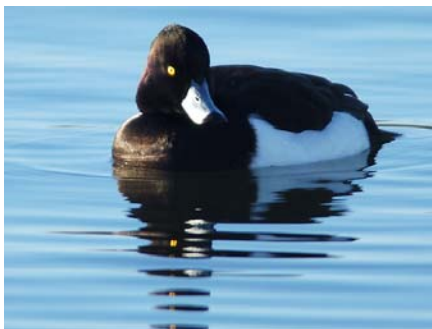


photo by G.Home

Tufted Duck – Diving Duck



photo by Steve Shaw

Mallard – Dabbling duck

Did you know that scientists have proved that ducks have regional accents? Recent research has shown that London ducks have a rough quack that sound a bit like laughing but Cornish ducks make a softer quacking noise that sounds more like giggling.

1a. As you walk along the edge of the plantation look out for robins all year round. The robin is easily recognised by its bright red breast. Male and female robins look exactly the same, however, young robins are speckled with light brown and do not have a red breast. Robins live in woodlands, parks and gardens. They eat fruit, seeds, worms and insects. Although they look cute, male robins can be very aggressive towards each other during the breeding season when they are protecting their territories.



photo by G.Home

Did you know in Victorian times postmen were known as 'robins' because they wore bright red uniforms. Victorian Christmas cards often have pictures of robins delivering the mail.

2. As you walk alongside the river keep your eyes peeled for a kingfisher. Often you will only see a flash of bright colours skimming low over the water, but if you are lucky you might see one perched on a branch. Kingfishers are unmistakable bright blue and orange birds. They feed on fish and insects; unlike other birds they don't build their nests in trees, they dig holes in the river banks.



photo by Mark Reeder

Do you know how the kingfisher got its bright colours? According to biblical legend the kingfisher was the second bird Noah sent from the ark in search of land. The kingfisher was originally grey however its back was stained with blue when it flew too close to the sky and its breast became orange when it was scorched by the sun.

3. The edge of the woodland is a good place to look for signs of foxes, if you are very lucky you might even see one. Foxes have red fur, a white chest and thick bushy tail called a “brush”. They are scavengers and will eat almost anything from insects and worms to fruit and berries. Foxes can be found in both the countryside and towns and gardens but are most active at night so can be quite hard to see. The best way to tell if there is a fox about is to look out for tracks, greyish droppings, and the strong, sour smell they use to mark their territory.



Did you know that during the mating season the female fox or vixen lets out ‘a blood chilling’ scream to attract a male fox.

4. Look out for hawthorn in the hedges on this section of the walk. Hawthorn is one of the most common hedgerow trees in Britain. This is because its long sharp thorns form a secure barrier so it’s often planted to keep cattle in. Hawthorn is known as the “May Tree” because it produces masses of white flowers in May. This is followed by clusters of bright red berries in autumn. **Hawthorn, like many berries is poisonous, look at the berries but don’t touch them.**



photo by Dean Stables



Did you know that according to legend ‘a fair maid who on the first of May goes into the field at break of day and washes in the dew from the hawthorn tree, will ever after handsome be’?

5. As you are walking back to the visitor centre, take a closer look in areas of long grass to see if you can spot a garden spider. Garden spiders vary in colour from pale yellow to dark brown but they all have a cross of white dots on their back. Garden spiders eat flying insects like butterflies, wasps and flies. They catch their food by laying in wait for insects which get trapped in their webs. You can see garden spiders from May-November but they are easiest to spot in late summer.



photo by Dean Stables

Did you know that spiders are not insects, they are arachnids? Insects have six legs and three body parts, head, abdomen and thorax whereas arachnids have eight legs and two body parts, abdomen and thorax.