

Detailed site guide and photography prepared by local naturalist and photographer Harry Appleyard

Tattenhoe sits on the south west corner of Milton Keynes, between Westcroft and West Bletchley. Its green spaces include Howe Park Wood, an ancient area of woodland covering around 61 acres and a linear park spanning two miles with various habitats including a brook, ponds, meadows and isolated broadleaf and coniferous woodland. Water Spinney, a smaller area of woodland in the linear park near Snelshall Street leads into Tattenhoe Valley Park, a much less-developed area with several large flower meadows, ponds, hedgerows and fields.

Site History

Up until the late 1990s, Tattenhoe largely consisted of rural land with many large open fields, meadows and woodland, with a farm covering most of the estate. While housing development resulted in the loss of most of the area's former green spaces, many of them are now owned and managed by The Parks Trust, including a linear park with a brook and balancing ponds and Howe Park Wood, an ancient area of woodland believed to date back to the last ice age, being designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest in 1992 for rare species including the Black Hairstreak Butterfly and various plants. Tattenhoe was also the site of a medieval village, with settlers using its woodland for various natural resources, such as fish, bought in through the use of a dam constructed at what is now Water Spinney, taking water from the nearby brook.

What to look for

With an array of habitats, Tattenhoe is a great place to look for wildlife all year round. Just a few of the area's many species are listed below.

Birds

Tattenhoe's many habitats are rich in bird species, both resident and migratory. During the spring and summer, migratory warblers including the Garden Warbler, Blackcap, Common Whitethroat and Lesser Whitethroat contribute to the dawn chorus as they breed near the ground throughout woodland and hedgerows. Skylarks sing above some of the wide open fields along the edges of Tattenhoe Valley Park where passing migrants such as the Wheatear, Whinchat and Yellow Wagtail may also be spotted looking for insects during the early spring and later summer. Kingfishers and Little Egrets are seen on a regular basis by the brook and its neighbouring ponds throughout the autumn and winter.

Water Spinney is home to many local resident birds including the Song Thrush, Great-spotted Woodpecker, Treecreeper and a well-established colony of Rooks. In late winter, the Rooks call loudly over the nearby traffic noise as they build their nests together in the canopy, often mobbing



Ring-necked Parakeet by Howe Park Wood, April 2012

passing Sparrowhawks, Common Buzzards and Red Kites. Tawny Owls can be heard throughout the year, most often on late summer and early autumn evenings as they defend their territories in anticipation of their next breeding season. In spring and late summer, the Spotted Flycatcher can be found along the woodland edges while Hobbys hunt for dragonflies and damselflies above the ponds as they migrate. Some of Buckinghamshire's increasingly widespread species including the Ring-necked Parakeet, Peregrine and Raven have also been spotted here in recent years.

Insects

Over 20 species of butterfly can be found throughout Tattenhoe's woodland and meadows. From late spring and into summer, meadows in and around the linear park provide food plants and territories for a large number of widespread resident species including the Marbled White, Common Blue and Dingy Skipper as well as passing migrants including the Painted Lady and the Clouded Yellow. Purple Hairstreaks can be found along the woodland edges as well as the linear park on summer evenings, usually seen in flight around the tops of oak trees, occasionally basking on branches closer to the ground. Tattenhoe is also one of a few areas in Milton Keynes to possess the declining Small Heath which often basks with closed wings around long grass and bushes near meadows. Many of these butterflies also share territories with a large number of day-flying moths including the Chimney Sweeper, Scarlet Tiger and the Hummingbird Hawk-moth.



Clouded Yellow Butterfly, Tattenhoe, October 2014 and Willow Emerald Damselfly, Tattenhoe, October 2016

Tattenhoe's brook and ponds are home to many of Buckinghamshire's dragonflies and damselflies including the Southern Hawker, Black-tailed Skimmer, Banded Demoiselle and the recently-established Willow Emerald Damselfly, which was discovered and officially recorded for the first time in the county in September 2016 by Harry Appleyard, making Milton Keynes the most westerly point at which the species has been found to date. June and July are the best months to look for most of the area's species with large swarms of Azure and Common Blue Damselflies mobbing Brown Hawkers and Broad-bodied Chasers as they lay eggs around the reed beds while the Emperor, the city's largest dragonfly can be seen catching various insects above the meadows running parallel to the brook. Some species including the Common Emerald, Migrant Hawker and Common Darter can be found all the way through summer and well into the autumn.

Mammals

Foxes, Badgers and Muntjac Deer can be found throughout the linear park and the nearby wooded areas. Smaller mammals such as the Bank Vole, Water Shrew and Weasel can occasionally be spotted out in the open in the daytime, usually scurrying through nearby vegetation. In recent years, the Roe Deer has also been spotted around the wooded areas on several occasions.



Roe Buck, Tattenhoe, August 2015

If visiting around dusk in spring and summer, you may also spot Hedgehogs on the move and several species of bat hunting near the site's wooded areas including the Common Pipistrelle, Noctule and Serotine.

Reptiles and Amphibians

In late winter and early spring, Common Frogs and Common Toads can be seen migrating and gathering for producing their spawn in large numbers around many of Tattenhoe's ponds. Common, Palmate and Great-crested Newts are also present across many parts of the site and can be spotted occasionally coming up to the surface for air in clear water or also on migration alongside the frogs and toads.



Grass Snake, Tattenhoe, June 2015

The only reptile to be recorded in Tattenhoe to date is the city's only wild snake, the Grass Snake, a non-venomous species which preys largely on amphibians and small fish in spring and summer. Although locally widespread, they are shy and usually move into cover when people are nearby. Their colours vary from dull, pale greens, greys and dark browns but most specimens have a distinctive black and yellow "collar".

Fish and Molluscs

Sticklebacks can be found in large numbers throughout the brook and ponds, along with small shoals of Rudd and the filter-feeding Swan Mussel, often falling prey to resident herons.



Swan Mussel, Tattenhoe, September 2009

Plants

Tattenhoe possesses over two hundred species of plants, including some national rarities. Trees include Oak, Field Maple, Ash, Hornbeam and various Willows, all of which can be found in Howe Park Wood, Water Spinney and along the linear park. Crocuses, Snowdrops and Daffodils are usually the first flowers to bloom each year, with isolated groups throughout the linear park, close to the footpaths. In late winter, cherry and blackthorn blossom blooms along many of Tattenhoe's bridal ways and red ways attracting various insects including bees, butterflies and hoverflies.

Carpets of Bluebells can be seen in Tattenhoe's woodlands between April and May, with the first flowers usually appearing in Water Spinney in mid-March, although they have been known to flower earlier in milder winters. As the Bluebells begin to disappear, various summer flowers including the Bee Orchid and Pyramidal Orchid can be found in small numbers around the meadows alongside large clusters of Clover, Buttercup and Cowslip. Several Common Yew trees surround St.Giles Church, providing berries for large groups of migratory Redwings and Fieldfares in the autumn.

Fossils



Tattenhoe Fossils

A variety of small fossils can be found around Tattenhoe's bridleways and exposed muddy areas. Common examples include sea creatures such as ammonites, belemnites and bivalves, pictured above.

How to get there

Car Parks and Refreshments

There are several free car parks around Tattenhoe. Two are situated by Howe Park Wood. One is located at the south end of the wood, just off Howe Rock Place (Grid reference: 837344), while the other is located on the north side, opposite the Westcroft Retail Park by Chaffron Way (Grid reference: 829346), just around the corner from The Parks Trust's Howe Park Wood Education and Visitor centre and the Howe Park Wood cafe. Two other car parks can be found a little further into the estate, including one off Portishead Drive, opposite The Prince George pub (Grid reference: 828339) and one opposite Tattenhoe Pavilion on Holborn Crescent, a little closer to the linear park, with refreshments and public toilets also available from the Pavilion building (Grid reference: 831337).

There are two other car parks on opposite ends of the linear park also. One is located near the Tattenhoe Allotments on Rosemullion Avenue, just off Tattenhoe Street opposite Emerson Valley (Grid reference: 841340) and the other is located on the Buckingham Road near the Pearce Recycling Centre, with a redway and underpass nearby leading to the start of Tattenhoe's brook and linear park (Grid reference: 822325).

Public Transport

Buses following routes 2, 8, 24/25 and 28 stop at Westcroft Retail Park, just opposite the north side of Howe Park Wood which can be reached on foot from the adjacent red way. Buses on routes 24 and 25 also travel through the Tattenhoe estate and can be stopped at several points near the linear park. Buses on route 8 also stop in Tattenhoe Park on Bronte Avenue, with red ways and gravel footpaths nearby leading to the linear park.