

## Olney river meadows in July – Julie Lane



This walk is about 4 miles long and is fairly easy walking throughout although it can be a bit muddy in patches down by the river in the winter. The path is not easily wheelchair accessible, being mostly meadow. Follow the map above in a clockwise direction

The walk starts and ends at the Olney Rugby Club car park to the right off East Street (SP891516), where parking is free.

Alternatively, Redline bus number 21 runs to Olney Market Square from CMK via Neath Hill, Willen, Gt Linford, Newport Pagnell and Sherington. The service is hourly Monday-Friday, and 2-hourly on Saturdays. (NB There is no service on Sunday). From Market Square, walk along the High Street and turn right down the alley just past the Carlton House Club, and across East Street.

Starting from the Rugby club car park walk down through Olney Rec to the River Ouse and the bathing steps. Turn right along the river bank and follow this through several fields. At this time of the year look out for herons and kingfishers (listen out for their high-pitched piping sound before you see a bright blue flash down low along the water), you might also hear a stock dove in the woodland on the opposite bank or see a pair of common terns with their beautiful bouncing flight following the course of the river. The riparian vegetation is lush at the moment and you can see stands of blue grey rushes, flowering rush *Butomus umbellatus*, purple loosestrife *Lythrum salicaria* and marsh woundwort *Stachys palustris*.



Above: (l) flowering rush *Butomus umbellatus*, (r) purple loosestrife *Lythrum salicaria*

On arriving at the bridge across the river to Clifton Reynes turn right instead across the meadow following the ancient track in the direction of the spire of Olney Church until you reach Olney mill.

Stop at the bend of the river to scan the opposite bank for interesting birdlife. There are goosanders on the river and this year they have managed to rear five chicks after an initial start with 9 fluffy babies. There is also a resident group of barnacle geese, swallows and martins skim low over the water and often a kingfisher can be heard and seen at the mill.

Cut up past the mill and through Olney church yard. This is famous for the wide variety of lichen species found on its gravestones and it has recently been managed more sympathetically for wildflowers and other wildlife.



*A re-wilded angel in the churchyard*

Cross the main A509 and cut through the housing estate that used to be the old Tannery site!! After a 100yds bear left and keep close to the river bank following the path down to the beautiful Goosey bridge. Otters are frequently seen along this stretch of the river but you would have to be up early to spot them, but listen out for reed and sedge warblers instead.

Turn right before Goosey bridge and cut through the meadows. The river here is a side loop off from the main river Ouse and consequently has a slower flow. It can be full of weed at this time of the year fringed by the yellow brandy bottle water lily. You might be lucky enough to see an enormous carp sunning itself near the surface of the water or even a hunting grass snake. It is a good area for all sorts of dragonflies and damselflies including emperor dragonflies and the

beautiful banded demoiselles. Reed bunting males are often singing in the bushes and there has been a grasshopper warbler reeling away in the reeds at the edge of the fields all summer. Foxes can be seen hunting for voles in the fields early and late in the day.



Goosey Bridge, which dates back to 1795

Turn right across the fields to the limestone escarpment looking out for brown hawkers and black-tailed skimmer dragonflies en route. The escarpment vegetation is kept in check by the rabbits that graze its sward and this enables lady's bedstraw, the yellow rockrose, salad burnet and musk thistle etc to thrive. The dog roses are often adorned with the parasitic robin's pin cushion.

If you have the energy cross the road and track up through the fields to the top of the hill where you can cut into the Barn field, a local wildlife site full of wildflowers and butterflies at this time of the year. The nightingale that sang there for several months in the spring has long gone but ravens can often be heard cronking as they fly over. This field has a magical feel at any time of the year and it seems a world away from CMK and the Snozone that can be seen on the distant skyline.

Either retrace your steps or cut back down through Olney to the high street, and thence the car park or bus stop.



Common spotted orchid  
*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*

**Julie Lane**  
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