

ABOUT THE RESERVE

The Lower Derwent Valley is a sanctuary for rare, scarce, and vulnerable wildlife species that thrive within the nationally rare floodplain meadow habitat. The site is protected under various legislations as a National Nature Reserve (NNR), Special Protection Area (SPA), Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Ramsar site. As a result, it is of the best, most ecologically intact floodplain river valleys remaining in the UK.

MANAGEMENT AND CONSERVATION EFFORTS

For centuries, the meadows have been managed by a traditional annual cycle of flooding and harvesting, sustained by local communities who have undertaken haymaking, grazing, wildfowling, fishing and basket making in the area. This working landscape supports a rich variety of wildlife and landscape features, and today, conservation efforts continue through a dedicated partnership comprising Natural England, Carstairs Countryside Trust, private landowners and local farmers, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and the Friends of Lower Derwent Valley.

LIMITS TO ACCESS

To safeguard this unique place, its traditional management, and incredible wildlife, much of the site lacks Public Rights of Way. Therefore, several designated viewing areas are provided for public enjoyment of the landscape.

The Lower Derwent Valley serves as a crucial wintering spot for tens of thousands of migrating wildfowl such as ducks, geese and swans from Iceland, Scandinavia and Russia. Providing these birds with a safe resting place to replenish their energy and refuel after a long journey is essential. Birds are highly sensitive to disturbances and depend on a quiet, safe environment to successfully regain their strength and later breed and raise their young in the summer.

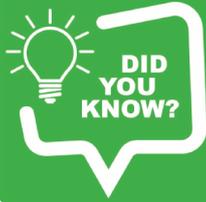
The reserve also serves as a significant site for ground-nesting birds. Human activities like walking, especially with dogs, or simply mere presence can disrupt their natural behaviour, causing them to feel threatened. Birds have evolved to perceive humans as predators, and any disturbance can trigger stress responses that lead them to abandon their nests, leaving eggs and chicks vulnerable to predators.

By keeping to designated paths, observing signage, and utilising the provided viewing areas, we can reduce disturbances and create a safe environment for threatened birds to thrive, raise their offspring safely, and refuel without disturbance, while still enjoying the special wildlife.

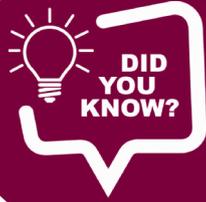
But what about livestock and management disturbance?

Livestock play a vital role in land management practices in the Lower Derwent Valley. Grazing is a conservation technique used to restore ecosystems and replicate natural processes that have historically shaped the landscape, thereby enhancing biodiversity. The presence of grazing animals is essential for maintaining healthy grasslands, controlling invasive species and promoting the growth of native plants and wildflowers. This not only benefits the diverse wildlife that inhabits this area but also ensures that this unique ecosystem will continue to flourish. Livestock movements are generally predictable and non-intrusive to most bird species which allows them to coexist harmoniously within the shared habitat.

The local farmers and other organisations working in the area also need to manage the land - ensuring the meadows are cut once the breeding birds have finished, invasive and non-native species are managed, and the open landscape of the site is maintained by controlling willow growth, whilst ensuring fences are in place. These actions are only carried out when required and at carefully chosen times of year to avoid disturbance, and without this management many of those species would cease to find the site attractive.



Did you know that one bird, the Whimbrel, embarks on an astonishing 16,000km annual migration from its wintering grounds in Africa to the breeding areas in Iceland and Fennoscandinavia? In just eight days spent in the Lower Derwent Valley each spring, these birds double their body weight to prepare for this daunting journey. The safety and tranquillity of this undisturbed refuge is essential for their successful migration and survival.



Did you know that species like the Curlew, who visit the meadows for breeding in spring, are facing trouble in the UK? With plummeting numbers and contracting range, the Lower Derwent Valley may support up to a quarter of all nesting Curlew in lowland England. These birds thrive here more so than in many other places, but we rely on your help to ensure they have the space and peace they require.

WILDLIFE THROUGHOUT THE SEASONS

In spring, the air is filled with the evocative calls and displays of Lapwing, Snipe and Curlew, while territorial disputes among Mallard, Teal and Shoveler are a common sight.

Summer brings forth beautiful sightings of Ragged Robin, Greater Burnet, Meadowsweet and Marsh Orchids, along with buzzing hoverflies and dragonflies. Ground-nesting birds such as Curlew find refuge in specific habitats during this season and the ghostly sight of a Barn Owl drifting by, or the rare rasping call of the Corncrake can sometimes be heard.

Autumn offers a spectacle of hundreds of Golden Plover returning from their Arctic breeding sites with many other wildfowl scattered across the reserve and surrounding farmland.

During winter, keep an eye out for vast flocks of Pochard, Pintail, Tufted Duck, Teal and Wigeon returning from Russia and Iceland, twisting and turning in a kaleidoscope of colour as they are chased by the local Peregrines or Marsh Harriers. Witness the majestic sight of Whooper Swans feeding on partially flooded grasslands and roosting on open waters and the evening flights of thousands of geese.

No matter the time of year, the Lower Derwent Valley presents something unique and special for visitors to enjoy.

VISITING THE RESERVE

Preserving the delicate ecosystem and wildlife of the Lower Derwent Valley is a shared responsibility that requires everyone to respect access limitations and to utilise designated facilities. Your cooperation in honouring these boundaries plays a vital role in safeguarding this precious environment.

We invite you to discover and appreciate our unique site through three primary access points:

North Duffield Carrs car park, Bank Island car park, and Wheldrake Ings car park.

If you choose to drive, voluntary car parking charges can be paid in advance or on the day using the RingGo app.

For your convenience, the map provided indicates both public and permissive footpaths where you can explore the area responsibly and enjoy its natural beauty.

Thank you for being mindful of the ecosystem and wildlife as you embark on your journey through the Lower Derwent Valley

GETTING INVOLVED

If you're passionate about conservation, why not consider volunteering at the reserve!

Tasks range from fencing to building boardwalks, making nest boxes, haymaking, scrub clearance, tree planting, constructing hides and more.

Contact us via:



www.facebook.com/LDVNNR



https://x.com/LDV_NNR

Lower Derwent Valley and Skipwith Common
National Nature Reserves Office

Bank Island • Church Lane • Wheldrake • North Yorkshire • YO19 6FE

Remember, your respect for the reserve's boundaries is crucial to preserving this unique environment. We hope that you enjoy your visit and reconnect with nature in this special sanctuary.

For recent wildlife sightings, visit

https://x.com/LDV_NNR

or for a monthly round up visit

<https://ldvnnr.blogspot.com>