

## **A SHORT GUIDE TO COCKSHERD WOOD**

Cocksherd Wood, known locally as Bluebell Wood, is a recognised local nature reserve, public open space, critical bio-diversity area and a listed wildlife heritage site. It is owned by Slough Borough Council and has been maintained through an informal arrangement with Evergreen 2000 Trust. It covers 12 acres, nearly 5 hectares.

### **GETTING THERE**

Post code SL2 2QB OS location [494525,182842]

There is some street parking available. Please park considerately.

Access : Because of motorcycle abuse in these woods access has had to be restricted. There is wheelchair access from Lynch Hill Lane. There are two steep climbs, one at the millennium steps and one near the Hetherington Close entrance. Both have handrails. Unfortunately neither is accessible by wheelchair.

Cocksherd Wood is an ancient woodland supporting a wide variety of flora and fauna and known locally as Bluebell Wood. Key plant species are field maple, birch, hazel, hawthorn, beech, ash, holly, honeysuckle, wild cherry, blackthorn, oak, rhododendron, goat willow, elder, rowan and English elm. Nationally important animal species include stag beetle, green woodpecker and bullfinch. Butterfly identified include small skipper, small tortoiseshell, large white, meadow brown and ringlet.

An interesting geological feature is the large hollow said to have been either (i) gouged out of the terrain by a glacier in the last ice age some 15000 years ago or (ii) the site of early gravel and clay extraction. Which do you think?

English bluebells are the star attraction in April. Rhododendrons have been identified as a potential threat both because of invasiveness and because of their supposed contribution to the spread of oak disease, but are at present under control. Japanese knotweed has been identified and suppressed near Farnham Lane.

Both roe deer and muntjac deer have been observed in the wood. Unfortunately some experts want deer to be treated as pests in a managed woodland environment but we prefer them to be treated as special guests. In a similar spirit fallen trees, of which there are many, are left where they fall to provide a varied habitat.

**Bluebells are in bloom generally within the period April 20<sup>th</sup> to May 5<sup>th</sup> but the exact dates when they are at their best can vary considerably.**

## **A TOUR**

See the map at the end of this paper.

The tour starts at ENTRANCE 2 on Lynch Hill Lane. Enter through the wooden kissing gate and go straight ahead. You will come to a large palisaded utility sub-station, so keep going with the sub-station immediately on your left. Beyond the sub-station keep going straight to a small green metal bench on the right of the path.

The area you are in is a small tree-less meadow. It occasionally floods because you are standing right on top of Two Mile Brook. Two Mile Brook rises in the chalk hills in Burnham Beeches. It seeps through the chalk right through Cocksherd Wood and then drains into a big culvert that heads underneath Lynch Hill Valley and Lammas Meadow before emerging into daylight at Haymill Valley. It then is culverted again, re-appearing occasionally in Cippenham, before finally emptying into the Thames. It was once an important waterway supplying power for the Ay Mill which stood where the petrol station is, not far from Burnham Station, and, where the brook crossed the Bath Road, it was a regular meeting point for royal stag hunts. (The stags were never killed!)

Go north from the bench towards Farnham Lane and then turn right on a path that takes you to the Millennium Steps. The Millennium Steps were installed in the year 2000 to celebrate the millennium. Before the steps were built walkers were faced with a formidable muddy bank to climb. Note that on the left of this path, between the path and Farnham Lane there is a considerable amount of rhododendrons. These are non-

native and are potentially a threat to Cocksherd Wood but seem unable to establish south of the path so are currently tolerated.

At the top of the steps bear left, where there is a second green bench. Carry on along this route parallel to Farnham Lane. There are still rhododendrons on the left, but on the right, from mid-April to early May you may find a carpet of English bluebells.

As you approach Entrance 4, turn right on the last path before the gate. This will circle back the way you came, but taking higher ground. Eventually you will reach a high open space with a very sharp cliff edge on your right. (Take care!) Here you will find the Concrete Oak, sometimes called Nelson's Oak. This tree probably started growing in the early 1800s about the time of Admiral Nelson. Over the years the base has eroded naturally leaving a hollow underneath. Unfortunately, at one stage children were lighting fires in the hollow hoping to see the tree come crashing down. In desperation, in 2001 Evergreen filled the base with barbed wire and concrete and this has miraculously saved the tree from certain destruction.

Now continue along this high ground until you find a slope downwards on your right, with a handrail installed in 2024. Descend carefully to the lower level. If you now turn right at the bottom you can explore the 'ice age swallet' identified, as already said, as being the result of either glacial erosion by the Two Mile Brook or more recent man-made excavation for clay and gravel.

Now return to the base of the slope you came down and continue on towards the utility sub-station and so back to the start at Entrance 4.

### **Bluebells in Cocksherd Wood**

The bluebells have been arriving earlier in recent years as shown by the following table of peak bluebell dates.

2009 - May 4th

2013 - May 6th

2017 - April 29th

2026 - April 13th

Thank you for visiting Cocksherd Wood.

