

Kingfisher

Summer flowering and one of the most attractive is stream water crowfoot, a relative of the buttercup. Woven fences have been erected in some places along the river bank to protect these plants, which can easily be damaged by dogs. At anytime of the year, if you are quiet, you may see a flash of turquoise as a kingfisher parts by.

**The River:** The clear waters arise from chalk springs running out of the Chiltern Hills to the west. The river has a rich plant community which thrives in the pure water.

What you might see in different parts of the site:

- A surfaced path follows the river and provides the River Walk.
- The Commons Walk follows a path around the edge of the Common (see centre map page for full description of these walks).

The site, to the west of Hitchin (see directions map), comprises the **Grazing Common** and the **River Oughton** running along its northern edge.

**Welcome to Oughtonhead Common Local Nature Reserve**

areas, except in the driest of summers. Frogs may start mating as early as February but by March frog spawning and hatched tadpoles will be present. In summer they are alive with bird activity with reed and sedge warblers nesting here.

Photos courtesy of Terry Caver, Gert Ellstrom, Phil Lumley, Nick Upton and N. Herts Museum Services.

**Dry Grassland:** In winter, large flocks of finches feed on seed in the grassland and adjacent farmland. In summer, wildflowers attract many grassland species of butterfly such as meadow brown and ringlet and you may hear a green woodpecker with its unmistakable "yaffle".

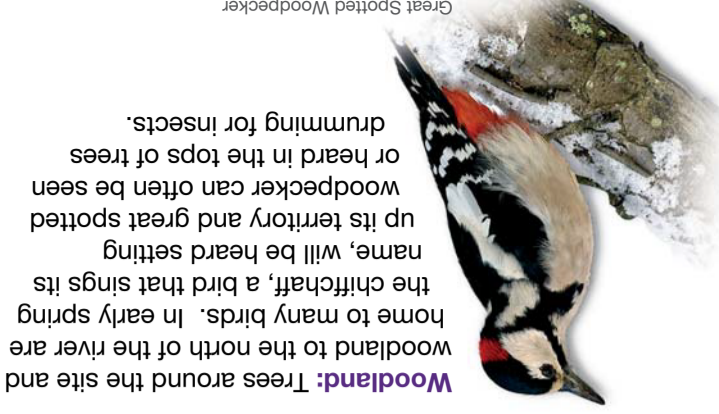


Burnet Moth

These wet areas are what most of the Common used to be like. Plants, like the delicate ladies smock flowering in early spring and the southern marsh orchid flowering in early summer, prefer these wetter areas. In summer you may see various species of dragonfly and damselfly and the colourful burnet moth which often feeds on the flowers of marsh thistle. Throughout the year you should see English longhorn cattle grazing in the grassland.

**Wet Grassland and Wet Ditches:**

**The Reed and Sedge Beds:** These are permanently wet areas, except in the driest of summers. Frogs may start mating as early as February but by March frog spawning and hatched tadpoles will be present. In summer they are alive with bird activity with reed and sedge warblers nesting here.



Great Spotted Woodpecker

**Woodland:** Trees around the site and woodland to the north of the river are home to many birds. In early spring the chiffchaff, a bird that sings its name, will be heard setting up its territory and great spotted woodpecker can often be seen drumming for insects.

Speckled Wood around the Common's edges. Speckled wood which prefers the dappled shade of the yellow brimstone and Spring butterflies include orange tip, bare bushes taking advantage of plentiful sunlight. Common including fieldfare and redwing. In early spring, bright yellow lesser celandine flowers under the and ivy berries, these attract many winter birds to the Along with buckthorn and autumn fruit.

**Hedgerows and Bushes:** Mainly these provide important food and shelter for wildlife. In spring blackthorn, hawthorn and elder provide a profusion of white blossom to be followed by late summer and autumn fruit. Hedgerows and bushes: Mainly these provide important food and shelter for wildlife. In spring blackthorn, hawthorn and elder provide a profusion of white blossom to be followed by late summer and autumn fruit.



**Volunteering Opportunities**

The **Friends of Oughtonhead Common** get together regularly to carry out conservation tasks to keep the site in the best condition, attract a diversity of wildlife and make it welcoming for visitors. Typical management tasks include:

- Coppicing scrub to encourage re-growth and add to diversity of habitat
- Hedgelaying and hedgerow planting
- Wet ditch and river bank maintenance
- Gate and seat installation
- Path clearance

**How to get there**



**By Road:** From the centre of Hitchin follow the A600 towards Bedford. Approximately 1 mile from the town centre turn left into Burford Way which runs into Swinburne Ave. Parking is available at Swinburne Ave playing fields car park. Access also available to the site via Redhill Rd/Oughtonhead Lane but parking is limited.

**By Public Transport:** Nearest bus stops are on Bedford Rd and Burford Way/Swinburne Ave. For travel details contact IntalinkTraveline on **0300 1234050** or [www.intalink.org.uk](http://www.intalink.org.uk)

Oughtonhead Common is managed by North Herts Council. Contact us at:

[www.north-herts.gov.uk](http://www.north-herts.gov.uk)  
Tel: **01462 474000**

The Countryside Management Service (CMS) works with communities in Hertfordshire to help them care for and enjoy the environment.

For more information contact us at:  
[www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/cms](http://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/cms) Tel: **01992 588433**

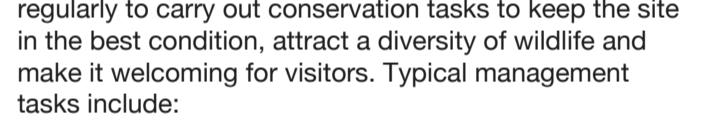


**Why volunteer?**

- Help maintain & improve the nature reserve
- Learn new skills
- Meet like-minded people

Contact CMS for more information

**Bring Communities Together**



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**Oughtonhead Common**



Unwind in the tranquillity of this ancient grazing Common within 2 miles of the centre of Hitchin

