



Leckhampton Natural History

Walk 2

Old Leckhampton Village

(approx 1 hour)

1. For a map of this walk, have a look at Walk 2 in the Local History series. One of the differences between the natural history and local history walks, is the impact the season makes to what you will see, hear and smell. This walk is written at springtime, so your walk may feel different in another season. Starting from the small car park opposite the church, begin by listening, what birds can you hear? You may hear most of the crows – Jackdaw, Magpie, Jay, Carrion Crow and even Raven. There may be a Buzzard calling, with its piercing *peeee-uu* call. Goldfinch will be about, as will Robin, Blackbird and any of the Tit family.

2. Follow the path west. As it narrows, there may be dense brambles, cow parsley and nettles on either side. Go through the gate and rise up onto the moat. The moat was formerly filled with water. It still retains water seasonally in springtime, but it is invariably stagnant, due to the absence of oxygenating water plants. Possibly for this reason, it appears to hold no amphibian life, but is full of invertebrate larvae, including a large mosquito population!
3. The moat area now makes up a small wood, with mature Ash, Willow and Oak trees. Unusually, there is plenty of dead wood for invertebrates and fungi to feed on. Snowdrop and Bluebell are abundant in spring. This small woodland has Bullfinch, Greenfinch and Goldfinch and there are often Buzzard, Sparrow hawk and Tawny Owls here. Chiffchaff and Blackcap are present from spring onwards. Nuthatch, Great, Blue, Marsh and Long-tailed Tits are found here all year, along with all the Crow and Thrush family. There is often a large Badger sett, built into the wall of the moat on which you are walking.



4. Go through the gate at the end of the moat and enter the meadow. This ancient field was known as The House Ground. To your left, there are the faint remains of fishponds, used as stock for the lords of the manor. To your right is a low ditch, which holds water seasonally. Rabbits and Moles are common in the meadow. Fox, Roe and Muntjac deer can often be seen at dawn and dusk in the field to your right, along with Pheasant. The path leads across the meadow to a gate on the far side. If you are here in springtime, the hedgerows will be full of blossom, but what tree is it growing on? If the blossom precedes the leaves, it is Blackthorn. If the leaves precede the blossom, it is Hawthorn. In either case, you will come across Whitethroat in the hedgerows here from late spring onwards.
5. As you cross the meadow, remember to look up. This is one of the areas of the walk with a good view of the sky. You will see raptors, which might include a Red Kite. You will see gulls, which will be mainly Lesser Black-backed and Herring Gulls. You may see crows, which will be Carrion Crow, but also Raven. Go through the kissing gate and on your right is a stile that will take you into the lane next to Moat Cottage. We will return to this spot, but for now, carry straight on across the next field and through into the horse field beyond.
6. On your right now, you will see a lovely little pond that is present year-round and has a good supply of aquatic plants. For this reason, it also has a good supply of toads and tadpoles in the spring. This pond is formed in the depression of an ancient hollow way, described in the local history walk. There is often a badger sett in the hedge above the pond. A Wren will often be seen searching for food at the bottom of the hedge. Now return to that stile and cross into the lane next to Moat Cottage.
7. Walk along the lane with large Poplar trees all around. Listen out for the yaffling call of Green Woodpecker or the loud drumming of Great-Spotted Woodpecker.

8. Carefully cross Kidnappers Lane and enter Lotts Meadow beyond. This is another ancient field system and meadow. There are a number of very ancient Oak trees present, the largest of which is around 500 years old. The meadow is bordered by Willow trees. This meadow has an excellent pond, but again it is seasonal. Frogs and Toads will spawn here, sometimes in great numbers, but if the spring and summer are dry, all the tadpoles may be lost.



[Blackthorn blossom]

9. There is a rich variety of grasses and sedge across the field and marshy areas and excellent cover for a variety of birds and mammals in the field borders. The pond never seems consistent enough to hold any wildfowl, nor the marsh large enough to hold any wading birds. I have seen Common Snipe here only once. The Farms & Fields walk explores this area more fully.

10. Cross Lotts Meadow towards Burrow's Field and go through the kissing gate. You are now crossing the Moorend Stream. This is only a small stream, but I have never seen it dry, so it is an excellent resource for local wildlife. It is engulfed in lush vegetation all year – Bramble, Elder, Cuckoo Pint, Sedge, Nettle, Cow Parsely and much more. I always wonder whether there might be Freshwater Crayfish in here, but it probably isn't a big enough stream.

11. If you look out onto Burrows Field, this is the only spot in the area where you invariably see gull species on the ground, most often Black-headed Gull. As you wander alongside the stream towards Church Road, there will be a wide variety of garden birds around you. Chaffinch and Goldfinch may be in the mature trees. There always seems to be a Robin along here and if you stop to listen, you should here a Blackbird, either calling, or rustling in the dead foliage in the allotments. If you are passing this way around dusk, you are sure to come across bats as well. Both Pipistrelle and Noctule bats are seen hunting around here.

12. At the end of the lane you will reach Church Road. It suddenly feels quite busy all of a sudden after those quiet leafy lanes and fields. But there is still wildlife to be found here. The houses in this area tend to have large, well-stocked gardens, so insect life is abundant and where there are insects, there are always birds and bats. The birds are common to those we have already covered – tits, fitches, crows and thrushes. There are definitely Hedgehogs here as well. I have never seen one on the road, but I have in the gardens, so keep your eyes peeled and listen out for their grunting calls.

13. Follow Church Road to the south, cross Kidnappers Lane with care, pass the Old Rectory on your right and this will bring you back to your starting point.



[Cuckooflower]

14. If you spot something of interest that you think we might want to add to this walk, please drop me a note to the email address copied below.

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Leckhampton Local History Society

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