



Leckhampton Natural History

Walk 5

The Farms and Fields

(approx 2 hour, OS map 179, 1:25 000)

1. For a map of this walk, have a look at Walk 5 in the Local History series. Numbers in brackets refer to this map. One of the differences, between the natural history and local history walks, is the impact that the season will make to what you see, hear and smell. This walk is written in springtime, so your walk may be quite different in another season. Starting from the small car park opposite the church (1), begin by listening. What birds can you hear? In most seasons you will hear the more common garden birds around here – Blackbird, Robin, Great and Blue Tits, Jackdaw and Magpie, and Woodpigeon.

2. Follow the path west, as it narrows passing the Old Rectory on your right. There may be dense brambles, cow parsley and nettles on either side. Go through the gate and rise up onto the moat (2). The moat was formerly filled with water. It 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 holds a small wood, with mature Ash, Willow and Oak trees. 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. Green and Great-spotted Woodpeckers, 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.



[Ground Ivy]

4. Go through the gate at the end of the moat and enter the meadow. Rabbit and Mole 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 small purple flowered Ground Ivy can be found low down in the grass along the edge of the Bramble. The path leads across the meadow to a gate on the far side (3). Go through and turn left, downhill. 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. The stream at the bottom is Hatherley Brook. There are mature Alder, Willow and Ash growing along the line of the stream. Hazel and Elder grow either side of the bridge. This is one of the two permanent water courses that run through the area. What life can you find in the stream? Stop and listen for birds calling from the trees overhead.
6. Climb the bank opposite. If you turn around, this is a good spot to watch tree top birds in the trees you just passed under. Make your way through the Bramble field to Farm Lane (4). Turn right and follow the pavement past Little Vatch on your right and cross the stile into the field. As you cross the field, don't forget to look up. This area affords great views of Leckhampton Hill. You may see gulls (Lesser Black-backed or Herring), Buzzards and any of the Crows.
7. Crossing Hatherley Brook again, follow the path straight ahead, past the stable. We make a slight detour to the right here to check out one of the few permanent ponds that forms in the old 'hollow way'. It is full of wonderful aquatic plants,, with a bed of Water Mint and Common Water-crowfoot. It's one of the few regular spots that will have tadpoles in spring.

8. Now head back to your original path and head over to Kidnappers Lane, below the large Scots Pine. Turn left and follow the road to the next corner. Turn right onto a footpath. (5).
9. Keep to the footpath as it turns first to the left (just before the private cottage) and then right. It skirts a number of small fields. You may common across any of the common garden birds in these fields and hedgerows. Just before the chicken pen, a small field on your left is full of Cuckoo Flower in spring.
10. This footpath eventually brings you to the Moorend Stream. The stream appears to have a sandy bed, but where it drops over any small waterfall, you will see the Lower Lias blue clay exposed, which makes up the subsoil across this whole part of the village. (6)



[Comfrey]

11. Turn to your right when you reach Moorend Stream and follow the path away from Shurdington Road and back towards Leckhampton. There are many naturalised plants in this section, like the Comfrey pictured. Soon you will emerge out of the trees and into a large open field called Lotts Meadow.
12. A wonderful feature of the meadow are the two ancient Oaks that survive. Another has died but still stands, but as dead wood, it still provides nutrients back into the ecosystem, through fungal and invertebrate decomposition. They say a tree has three stages, a third to grow, a third to mature and a third to die. It is most productive for other life in the last third.
13. This wonderful meadow is bordered on the north edge by a deep lateral thicket of Willow, Ash and Blackthorn that shelters the Moorend Stream. This is full of woodland and garden birds. There are Willow thickets in the middle of the meadow now as well. At the east end, is a seasonal pond, that sadly often dries out before the tadpoles have a chance to mature.



14. Follow the field edge on the left. You will come to a gate that takes you over the Moorend Stream. Follow the path upstream. There is lush plantlife all around the stream.



[White Deadnettle]

15. Along with the White Deadnettle shown above, you will find Comfrey, Cow Parsley, Common Nettle, Sedge and Dock.
16. At the end of the footpath, you will reach Church Road (7). Turn right and head towards St Peter's Church. The gardens will hold some of the same birds and flowering plants as the fields. Soon you will return to your starting place opposite the lovely lych gate to the church yard (1).
17. 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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