

STOP 3

The reedbed is cut here to allow a view across the Lake towards the Mendip Hills. Many birds use the reedbed along this shore, for breeding, feeding and for security. Large flocks of Tits (Blue, Great Coal and Long-Tailed) and the tiny Goldcrest wander up and down the reedbeds throughout the year searching for aphids and other insects. This is a good place to hear two of our summer visitors, both secretive birds, but which are vocal from April to July. They

are the Reed and Sedge Warblers, whose songs are similar, but the Reed Warbler often includes a "jag-jag-jag-kerr-kerr-kerr" song, whereas the Sedge Warbler makes a sharp "tuc-tuc-tuc" sound. Coots abound along the Lake's edge, their loud piping "kowk" seemingly coming from nowhere. Out in the open water the Great Crested Grebes can be seen fishing – one moment a long-necked and frilled paddling bird, the next second just a few

ripples where it disappeared – diving into the deep water in search of small fish. In the spring and early summer they may be seen carrying their young on their backs. Surprisingly Chew Lake does not support very many frogs, toads or newts, but grass snakes can sometimes be seen swimming in the water's edge. Look out for a badger's footprint in the damp earth; they regularly visit this corner of the wood at night.

THE GREBE TRAIL

STOP 1

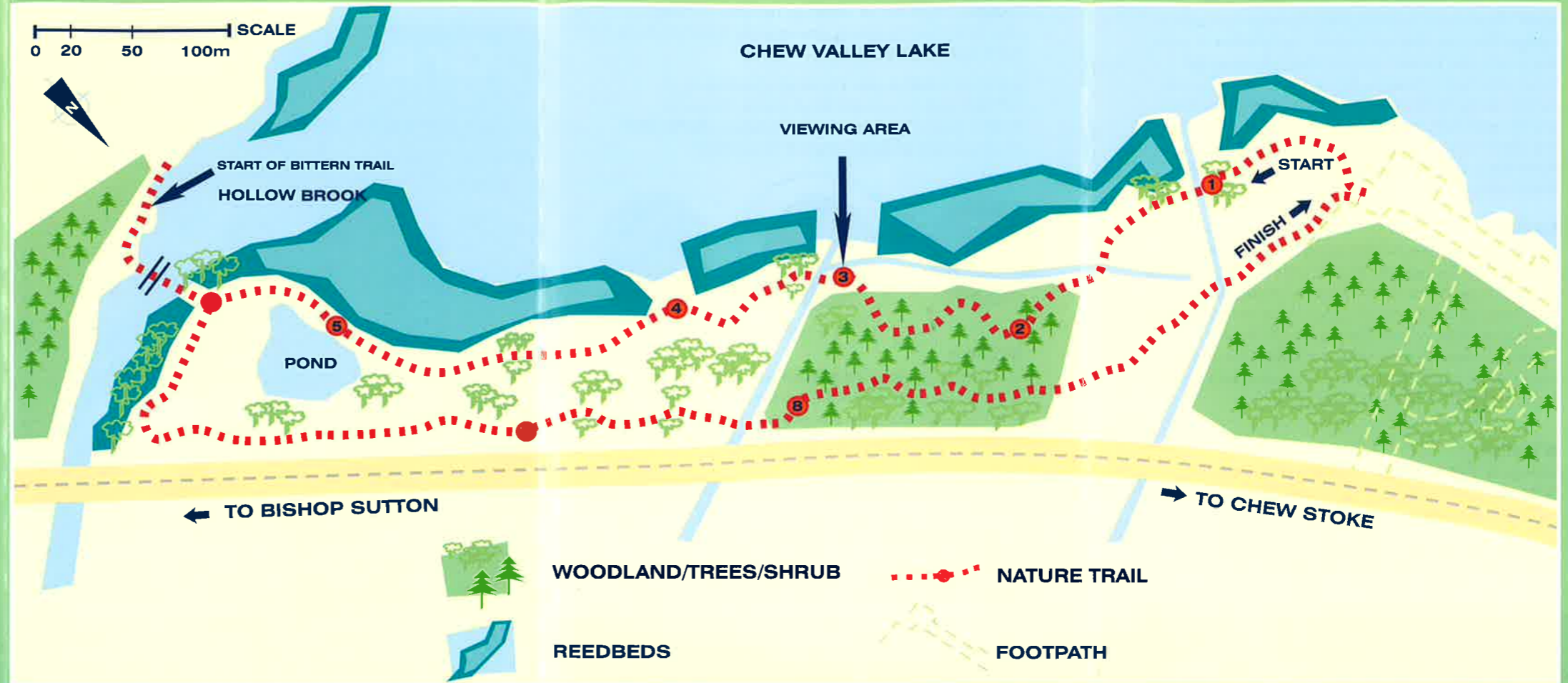
This small ditch helps to fill up the Lake in winter, but dries up in summer. Across the water is Denny Island, an ideal, safe nesting site for Great Crested Grebe, Mallard, Tufted Duck and especially Canada Geese.

The reedbeds are a very important habitat, but must be cut on a three year rota to stop the development of scrub woodland. The Crack Willow in front of you has already invaded the reeds.

The tall 'Phragmites' reeds were once cut and used for thatching in years gone by. The smaller grass-like reed with broader leaves is Reed Canary Grass which prefers a less waterlogged soil. On drier ground still, look out for the light purple flowers of March Woundwort which appear from July onwards. Reed Buntings with their bright brown plumage, and looking like a smarter version of the House Sparrow, are common reedbed birds. The male has a distinctive black head in summer.

STOP 2

In contrast to the reedbeds the woodland is cool and dark and is home to very different animals. This plantation, established in 1953, contains Sweet Chestnut, Beech, Sycamore, Oak, Hornbeam, Larch, Scots Pine and Corsican Pine. At present only Ivy, Holly and a few other shade-loving plants grow under the dense tree canopy, but thinning is planned to allow more light to penetrate and enrich the ground flora below. Look for Coal Tits high in the Larch and Pines searching for food. Chaffinches also like the plantation and you may glimpse the small, brown Tree Creeper as it clings to tree trunks searching for creepy-crawlies in the bark.



For weekly updates on nature trails and birdwatching plus leisure events information

visit our web site: www.bristolwater.co.uk/leisure

Bristol Water plc gratefully acknowledges the support of the Countryside Commission and the Nature Conservancy Council in the creation of the nature trail.

STOP 4-8

See reverse of this leaflet.



STOP 4

The opening through the reeds allows you to look across the inlet of Hollow Brook, a major tributary of the Lake. Duck, such as Tufted, Ruddy and Mallard are attracted to the inlet's mudbanks in search of insect larvae, molluscs and crustacea. Coots are always numerous and, in

winter, Chew attracts numbers of less common duck such as Gadwall, Shoveller, Teal and Pochard. The Dabchick, or Little Grebe, can often be seen diving for Roach Fry along the brook, while Swifts, Swallows, House and Sand Martins can be seen swooping overhead or skimming over the reedbeds and the open water, feasting on the abundant fly life. Swallows and Martins arrive in late March and stay until October or November, but Swifts arrive later and stay only for twelve or thirteen weeks.

STOP 5

The pond was excavated in 1988 and is connected to the Lake by a high level pipe, so it can fill at top water level but should not empty when the Lake level falls. It already contains Tadpoles, Water Boatmen and Pond Skates and it will be interesting to see how quickly plants and other animals move in. The marsh vegetation beside the pond consists of a good mix of sedges, rushes, marsh plants and grasses. You will probably smell the fragrant Wild Mint, even if you do not see it.

STOP 6

Here the BITTERN TRAIL branches off via the wooden footbridge over Hollow Brook. For descriptions of its wildlife see the separate Guide.

To continue on the shorter GREBE walk, do not cross the bridge but stay on the hard surfaced path.

STOP 7

Here, having climbed slightly higher ground you can look over the reed beds to the Lake beyond. You may, in April-May, catch a glimpse of a Swan sitting on her nest in the reeds in front of you.

The meadow here is not grazed, but is cropped for hay. This prevents the grass from being overrun by brambles and shrubs, and encourages a wide range of flowers to develop. You will see a good range of flowers such as Knapweed, Vetch, Hogweed, Ladies Smock, Buttercup, Dandelion and Bugle. Also, Bluebell and Speedwell grow under the Dogwood shrubs on the bank beside the road.

Unimproved meadows like this attract a good variety of butterflies such as Larch and Small Skipper, Orange Tip, Meadow Brown, Common Blue and Brimstone, and Speckled Wood butterflies inhabit the edges of the woodland.



STOP 8

Back in the wood there are Red Campion and Bluebells to see in late spring and another chance to see woodland birds in the trees above. In autumn you may see toadstools growing in the leaf litter or bracket fungus growing on tree stumps.

THE GREBE TRAIL now winds its way through the wood and back across the meadow to the Picnic Area car park.



Bristol Water plc
PO Box 218, Bridgwater Road
Bristol BS99 7AU
0117 953 6470



Grebe Trail

Trail Guide for Chew Valley Lake

NATURE GUIDE



Woodford Lodge
Chew Stoke
Bristol BS18 8XH
Tel/Fax: 01275 332339

20p

Welcome to the Bristol Water Chew Valley Nature Trail

Bristol Water created Chew Valley Lake in 1956 to meet the demand for water by the million or so people who live in the Company's area of supply. Since then wildlife has taken over the many habitats available around the lake's margins and this trail has been opened to give visitors an opportunity to see and enjoy the many wild flowers, insects and animals as well as the beautiful views.

The Trail is in two parts, the first signposted by Grebe signs, the second is signposted by Bittern signs.

THE GREBE TRAIL is a hard surfaced, all weather path suitable for pedestrians, pushchairs and wheelchairs and covers a circuit 1.2km long, starting and finishing at the wooded Picnic Area. You are welcome to bring dogs, but they **MUST** be kept on a lead to avoid disturbance to nesting birds.

REMEMBER TO KEEP QUIET AND TO KEEP YOUR EYES AND EARS OPEN, ESPECIALLY TO ANY MOVEMENT IN THE REEDBEDS AND WOODLAND. THE LESS DISTURBANCE YOU CAUSE THE MORE WILDLIFE YOU WILL SEE.

