



## Stocker's Lake Self-guided Walk – Winter (November – February)

Stocker's Lake is a large and attractive lake in the Colne Valley. The lake is owned by Affinity Water and managed by Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust. As you enjoy this self-guided walk, look out for ducks on the lake. The majority of these birds have flown hundreds of miles to spend the winter months here, escaping the freezing weather of northern and western Europe.

Follow the route on the map overleaf, using the instructions below as a guide.

- A.** As you look over Stocker's Lake from the viewpoint try to spot different ducks. These birds can be grouped by the way they eat: Divers, such as **tufted duck** and **pochard**, search for food by swimming under the water, whereas dabblers, like **mallard** and **teal**, up-turn their bodies to feed in surface water.
- B.** Some recent work by the Trust to create ponds and ditches in this area will benefit wildlife, including **dragonflies, wetland plants, bats** and **water voles**. In winter months, many creatures will continue to live in the ponds, even if they freeze over! **Dragonfly nymphs** are aquatic and will stalk the pond, looking for something to gobble up. They use a specially adapted jaw, it unhinges to grab unwitting prey.
- C.** Time for some more waterfowl! This spot is great for **shoveler** and **gadwall**. Shoveler have a spatula shaped bill, which they use to filter tiny animals and plants from the water. Look out for them spinning around as they feed. Gadwall are a little smaller than a mallard and have a black end to their bodies. They have exquisite plumage if seen up close; fine barring and speckling. The males are grey coloured and the females brownish with orangey bills. Also look out for **great crested grebes**.
- D.** The River Colne is on your right. **Kingfishers** are active in winter and fly along this stretch of the Colne, hunting small fish. If you are extremely lucky you might spot an **otter**, their spraints (droppings) or prints in the mud! Another group of birds, the **thrushes**, have their numbers boosted by migrants flying in from further north. The tree lined banks and hedgerows full of berries are the best places to look. Listen out for **redwings** that call to each other in flight – a high pitched 'seep seeeep' and **mistle thrushes** that make a harsh rattling sound. At dusk, look out for **barn owls** hunting in the fields.
- E.** This is a lovely place to take in the winter scenery of Stocker's Lake. While here, try differentiating between **coots** (black body, white bill) and the smaller **moorhen** (brown back, red bill with yellow tip). The islands in front of you are maintained by the Trust for **nesting wildfowl** and **over-wintering invertebrates**. A relative of the crow, **jays** may be seen flitting between islands with mature trees.
- F.** **Wet-woodland** is an important habitat for lots of wildlife. This area is home to unusual plants and bird species that have suffered significant population declines. The Trust are maintaining this wet-wonderland for these special plants and animals. If you're lucky, you may even see a sparrow-sized **lesser-spotted woodpecker** high up in the **alder** trees. Did you know that the wood of alder doesn't rot underwater? Their female catkins (these produce seed) look like mini pine cones and open in winter.
- G.** As you walk along the vegetation-lined paths, stop every now and then to listen for rustling. You could be hearing **wood mice** or **bank voles** foraging within the tracts of dead wood. Over to the left, the Trust are maintaining a sedge bed. In winter, **Cetti's warblers** can be heard blasting out their loud staccato melody, even during winter, but they are not often seen! We have also created channels through the

sedge which are favoured by **water rail**. The squealing sound of these beautiful, shy birds is also more often heard than the bird is seen.

- H. Look over the lake to the island opposite. It is in these trees where **grey herons** and **little egrets** will be making their nests and rearing young later in the year. Can you see any sitting in the willows? Stocker's Lake is home to the largest heronry in Hertfordshire, over 30 pairs have been recorded nesting. The bright white-plumaged egrets nest around the protective herons as a means of safety from predators.
- I. Growing along the edge of the lake, you can see another row of alders. As their catkins are now open, seed-eating finches such as **siskin** and **goldfinch** can be seen feeding in large groups. **Redpolls** may be with them. Look right the way to the tops so you don't miss these charming winter visitors moving from one tree to the next. This is another fine location to see **great-crested grebes**. To the left of the path on an island, you will see a **kingfisher** nesting bank. They may choose to nest here in future years, so be sure to come back!

Find out more about Stocker's Lake and your local wildlife by visiting:

[hertswildlifetrust.org.uk](http://hertswildlifetrust.org.uk)



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**STOCKER'S LAKE**



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## STOCKER'S LAKE



Key	
	Reserve boundary
	Footpath
	Bird hides
	Gate
	Tee room
	Interpretation board
	Parking