

At over 300 acres, Black Brook is one of our largest nature reserves and is a wonderful area to visit during the summer months. It provides many opportunities to spot some of our most treasured species of birds, flora and fauna. The majority of Black Brook is moorland, an extremely precious and rare wildlife habitat. Globally, moorland is rarer than rainforest, and because of its scarcity, the land has been protected for nature conservation purposes. The moorland is part of the Leek Moors Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and most of the reserve is also within a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Area (SPA). Senior Reserves Officer Jon Rowe guides you around this unique site.

1 Park at Gib Torr lay-by. As you leave head uphill towards the conifers and walk up the road towards Gib Torr Farm. Stand with your back to Gib Torr Farm and take the footpath on the opposite side of the road and to your left.

2 Follow the footpath to a stile and look out for meadow pipits darting around. This section of moorland used to be covered in tall conifer trees that cast a dark shadow and supported little wildlife, but now it is a thriving wildlife haven, full of insects, birds, wildflowers and plants. Pause

for a moment to look at the heather and bilberry growing on the rotten tree stumps.

3 Go over the stile and follow the path as it heads towards a rocky outcrop. Take care in this section as the footpath crosses blanket bog, so place each foot carefully to make sure the ground is stable and safe before putting your full weight down. Look out for cotton grasses and sphagnum, which are busy soaking up water and slowly biodegrading under their growing surface. These incredible species of fauna are forming our peat soils of the future, locking up carbon as they work. When you reach the rocks, look and listen out for curlew and lapwing in the valley below you. This is an important breeding ground for both birds, providing the special feeding and nesting habitats they need. Look beyond the valley and you will see the Roaches towering in the background.

4 Follow the path along the ridge, called Baldstones Ridge, and look out for kestrels in the valley below. They use this area a lot for feeding on voles that live in the long grass. Short-eared owls can also be seen if you are lucky, and at dusk this area is used by barn owls so if you're on a sunset walk keep an eye out for these beautiful birds.



5 You'll arrive at a gate: go through this leaving the nature reserve briefly and head down towards a road. Turn right when you get to the road and walk down the road on your left. You will see a large field full of rushes - this area is called Hazel Barrow and is a really good area to see and hear a curlew.

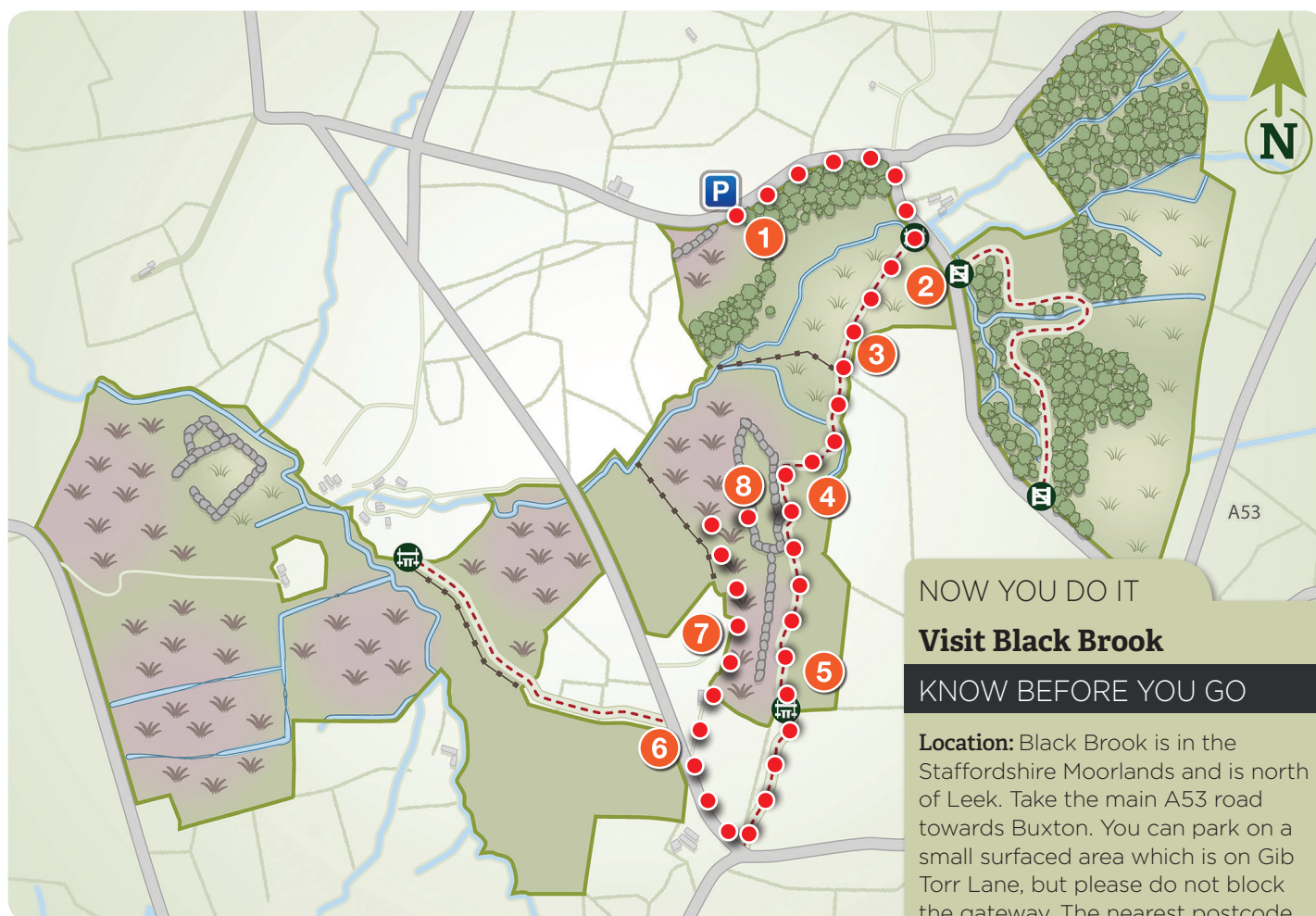
6 Look out for the public footpath sign up the driveway on the right, follow this public right of way. This will take you to a stile over a fence and back onto Black Brook Nature Reserve.

7 Once back on the nature reserve follow the footpath back up towards the ridge. Look out for the yellow flowers of tormentil amongst the patches of heather and bilberry.

A ramble at Black Brook

Jon Rowe





8 Back on the Baldstones Ridge you will have a chance to stop and look back at the valley below again. Then you'll walk back along the footpath retracting your steps back towards the conifer plantation and Gib Torr Farm.

If you enjoyed your walk today, you might also enjoy a visit to nearby Gun Moor. This site is much quieter than our Roaches reserve and will provide you with equally spectacular views over the surrounding landscape.

NOW YOU DO IT

Visit Black Brook

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Location: Black Brook is in the Staffordshire Moorlands and is north of Leek. Take the main A53 road towards Buxton. You can park on a small surfaced area which is on Gib Torr Lane, but please do not block the gateway. The nearest postcode is SK17 OTA. To get to the parking area, turn off the A53 onto Gib Torr Lane and you will see the pull in on the left, a short distance before the trees on the right end. If you reach Gib Torr Farm you have gone too far.

Opening times: Open at all times.

Access: A reasonable level of fitness is needed for this walk. There are a number of public footpaths across the reserve and some additional established paths. The terrain is uneven and all the paths are unsurfaced. It is often extremely wet in places. Away from established paths the terrain is tall, tussocky vegetation that makes walking difficult. Stiles and narrow gates present onsite. Dogs must be kept on leads at all times.

Phone: 01889 880100

Email: info@staffs-wildlife.org.uk

Website: www.staffs-wildlife.org.uk/nature-reserves/black-brook

TOP WILDLIFE TO SPOT



Heather

Heather, also known as 'ling', is widespread across heathland, moorland, bogs and even in woodland with acidic or peat soils. Its delicate pink flowers can be enjoyed between August and October. They can live for up to 40 years or more.



Common cotton grass

Common cotton grass has fluffy, white seed heads. It's a sight to behold in the summer months as it dances in the breeze, bringing a softness to this isolated moorland landscape. Despite its name, common cotton grass is a member of the sedge family.