



Location

The reserve is located on the southern edge of Warminster. It can be reached by walking through the Lake Pleasure Grounds from Weymouth Street, or from the car park just off Smallbrook Road.

If using bus: Regular services to Warminster town centre. Visit www.wiltshire.gov.uk/parkingtransportandstreets

If cycling: Visit www.sustrans.org.uk

Access: There are paths in both directions from car park; western one is wheelchair-friendly.

Nearby reserves

Dunscombe Bottom

About Wiltshire Wildlife Trust

Our vision is to create a county rich in wildlife and to help people live sustainable lifestyles that protect the environment for the benefit of everyone.

We have more than 18,000 members, look after over 40 nature reserves, are supported by hundreds of volunteers, and work with local communities, schools, businesses and public bodies to achieve our aims. To do all this we rely on the support of our members.

If you would like to join us, or to find out about how you can help the environment please visit www.wiltshirewildlife.org

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Water avens
Philip Precey



A sustainable future for wildlife and people
Wiltshire Wildlife Trust **Nature reserves**

Smallbrook Meadows



Front cover photo: Bullfinch, Darin Smith



Smallbrook Meadows

The reserve lies along the River Wylde and its tributary the River Were (also known as Swan River). It has a range of **different habitats**, including wet woodland, open water, the chalk streams of the rivers Wylde and Were, traditional water meadows, an old orchard, hedgerows and ditches.

It is divided into two sections with a small car park located between them. Take the main path through the reserve to the **Lake Pleasure Grounds** and Warminster town centre.

Smallbrook Meadows supports an incredible array of wetland wildflowers. In late spring look out for the delicate white and pink cuckooflower (also known as lady's smock), the food plant of the orange-tip butterfly.

These are followed by the dark pink flowers of ragged robin and pink-cream of **water avens** and as the season progresses, the pink-purple tall spikes of southern marsh orchid.

Birdlife is rich and varied here. Our regular visitors include the colourful kingfisher and little egret. Other birds to look out for are **grey wagtail**, bullfinch, long-tailed tits and water rail.

An aerial display of colour is put on by the dragon and **damselflies** throughout the warmer months, with dragonflies such as ruddy darter in late summer.

Smallbrook is also home to **frog** and toad, **water vole**, otter, deer and the rare Desmoulin's whorl snail.

In late summer, the smell of water mint fills the air and visitors might catch a glimpse of the bright, shiny metallic-green **mint beetle**.



Pond dipping platform
Owain Shaw WWT

History

In the **Middle Ages** the land that now forms Smallbrook Meadows nature reserve is believed to have been owned by Smallbrook and Warminster manors, and that it surrounded a mill of **Saxon origin**. The name Smallbrook comes from Smalebroc, meaning a narrow stream (or small brook), the name given to the River Were as early as 1086.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, the land was likely to have been owned by the **Smallbrook Estate** and was converted from common meadow to enclosed water meadows. The estate fell into debt during the 18th century and the land was sold to a number of people.

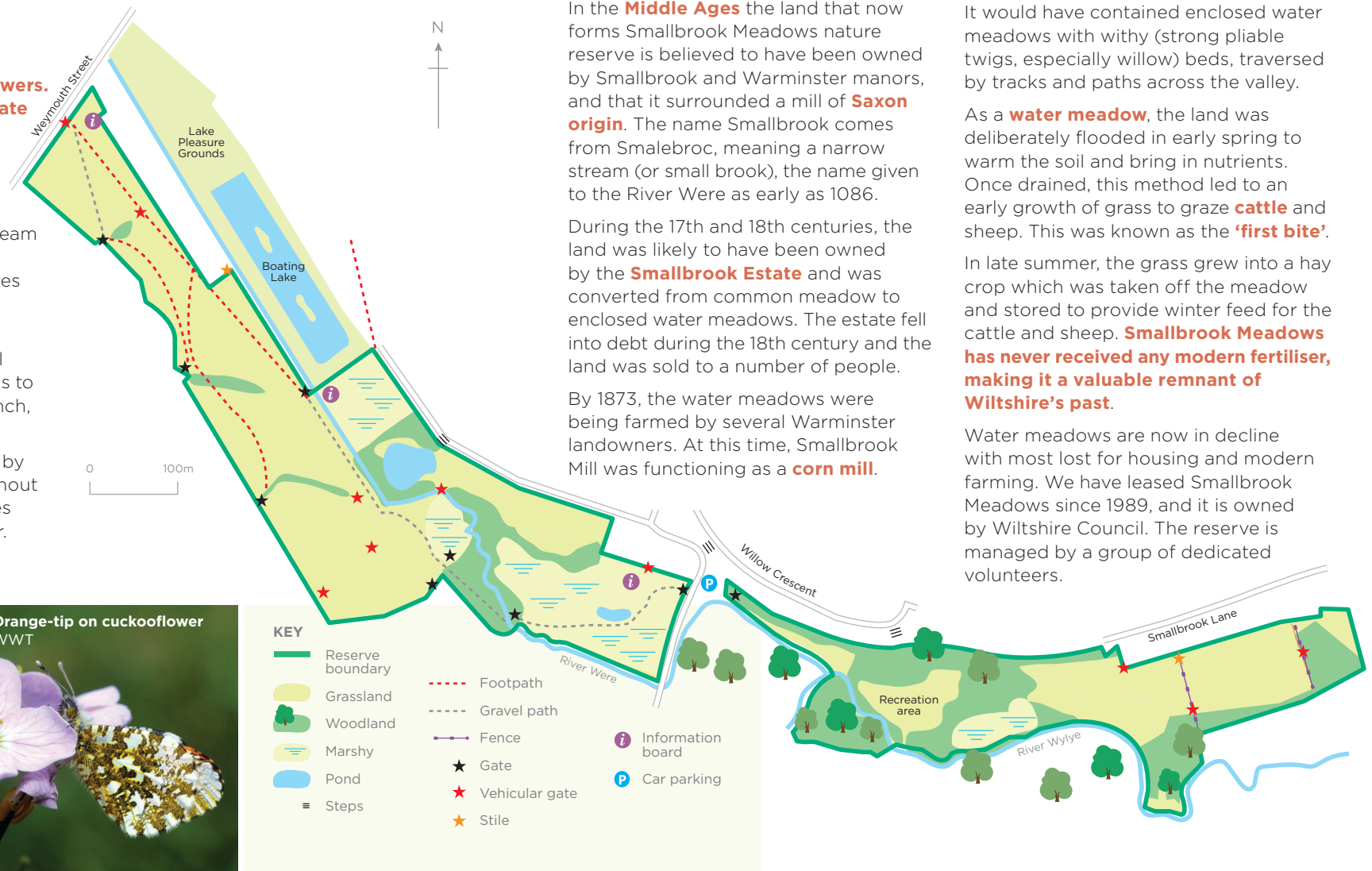
By 1873, the water meadows were being farmed by several Warminster landowners. At this time, Smallbrook Mill was functioning as a **corn mill**.

It would have contained enclosed water meadows with withy (strong pliable twigs, especially willow) beds, traversed by tracks and paths across the valley.

As a **water meadow**, the land was deliberately flooded in early spring to warm the soil and bring in nutrients. Once drained, this method led to an early growth of grass to graze **cattle** and sheep. This was known as the **'first bite'**.

In late summer, the grass grew into a hay crop which was taken off the meadow and stored to provide winter feed for the cattle and sheep. **Smallbrook Meadows has never received any modern fertiliser, making it a valuable remnant of Wiltshire's past.**

Water meadows are now in decline with most lost for housing and modern farming. We have leased Smallbrook Meadows since 1989, and it is owned by Wiltshire Council. The reserve is managed by a group of dedicated volunteers.



Banded demoiselle
Vicky Nail



Orange-tip on cuckooflower
WWT