

HOLYWELL DENE

Set within a spectacular incised valley, *Holywell Dene* is the only area of ancient semi-natural woodland remaining within North Tyneside. Stretching over North Tyneside Council's boundary into Blyth, the Dene is jointly managed with Blyth Valley Borough Council.

Declared as a Local Nature Reserve in 2003, the Dene has a number of interesting habitats that can be explored along its entire stretch. These include oak-ash woodland, beech woodland, ponds and wildflower meadows. In the woods pistourelle and noctule bats have been detected, whilst the Beeth Burn watercourse running through the site supports species such as otter and kingfisher. The site holds significant ornithological interest, supporting bird species such as great spotted woodpecker and tawny owl. Other birds recorded in the Dene include song thrush, tree sparrow, yellowhammer, dunmuck and blue tit.

The ground flora is typical of this type of woodland, although in the past cattle grazing severely reduced the variety of plants found. However, cattle are now excluded from some sections of the Dene and this has helped to regenerate those areas and improve the overall richness of the ground flora. Wood anemone, dog violet, primrose, hellebore, garlic mustard and buttercup are just some of the wildflowers that can be seen.

Access to the Dene is via the B1325 (Hartley Lane), where a small car park offers limited free parking.

WALSSEND DENE

A mosaic of ancient grassland and scrub lies here, with grazed pastures and areas of more formal parkland and amenity use. The Dene is an important wildlife corridor and contains two areas of high nature conservation value: Burn Close Pasture and Willington Gut Saltmarsh.

Burn Close Pasture is one of the few areas of ancient semi-natural grassland left in North Tyneside and contains key plant species such as dyer's greenweed, common fleabane, smooth fescue and pepper sagefrage. The Willington Gut Saltmarsh is recognised as a separate Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI), as it is the only characteristic middle saltmarsh community left on the River Tyne. It extends for approximately 0.5 km inland along the Dene to the road at Church Bank. Typical species found here include sea milkwort, sea arrow grass and sea aster.

In addition, blue orchids grow on the open grassland below the war memorial at Roughill. Here the orchid is at its extreme northern limit in the UK. Good populations of invertebrates are associated with these grassland areas, including butterflies such as small tortoiseshell, meadow brown and common blue.

Other areas of the Dene, in particular the area around Holy Cross, contain dense scrub made up of hawthorn, blackthorn, elder and dog rose. These areas provide food, cover and breeding sites for birds including song thrush, dunmuck, linnet and blackbird. Several grazed pastures are located to the west of Holy Cross, divided up by hedgerows of the same species of scrub.

Access to the Dene on foot can be made at several points along its length but the main entrance is found at the foot of Crow Bank, where there is space for a few cars to park.



ST MARY'S ISLAND

Originally declared as St Mary's Island and Curry's Point Local Nature Reserve in 1992, but more commonly known as St Mary's Island (LNR), the site is situated on the coast at Whitley Bay and forms part of the much larger Northumberland Coast SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest).

Connected to the mainland by a causeway that can be crossed at low tide, the island is home to St Mary's Lighthouse. The lighthouse was decommissioned in 1984 and is now a visitor centre, popular with tourists and schools. The seabed around the island and cliff tops at Curry's Point were designated as a Voluntary Marine Nature Reserve (VMNR) in 1996.

The LNR comprises of cliff top grassland, wetland, tidal and sub-tidal habitats, the small semi-tidal island and a freshwater pond. The area holds major geological, ornithological and marine interest.

The rock pools are home to a wonderful array of marine life, which seldom can be observed from the island itself. The shoreline and newly created cliff top wetland are favourite feeding and resting sites for many waders, terns and gulls.

The wetland is particularly important as a high tide roost for golden plovers, oystercatchers, curlew and redbank, and as an important landfall for passing migrants in spring and autumn. The cliff top grassland at Curry's Point is locally important, as it is one of only a few remaining old, semi-natural grasslands in North Tyneside.

Parking for the site is provided by two car parks along Trinity Road, which is accessed off The Links (A192). One of the car parks has a public toilet.



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Located within the Rising Sun Country Park in the heart of North Tyneside, Swallow Pond is one of the biggest and most significant subsidence ponds for wildfowl and wading birds in Northumberland.

The LNR incorporates Swallow Pond, mixed plantation woodland, grassland, a seasonal wetland and a collection of smaller ponds. Declared in 1992, it is one of the oldest LNRs in North Tyneside. In the past the reserve has been the site of a coal mine and a landfill for domestic waste, but is now home to a fantastic array of wildlife. In winter, teal and lapwing arrive in their hundreds, whilst tufted duck and pochard arrive following winter years. Spruce, sedge, meadow, thornier and whooper swans are regular winter visitors, too.

In summer months breeding birds include common tern, shoveler, little ringed plover, little grebe, mute swan, mallard and moorhen. Whilst reed bunting and yellow wagtail can be seen around the pond margins. The pond is also an important bathing site for gulls, whilst short-eared owls regularly hunt over the marshy grassland.

Rabbit, hare, fox and deer are all found in the woodland and grassland surrounding the pond. The smaller ponds and network of ditches around the site are also teeming with life: frogs, newts, dragonflies and other invertebrates all make their home there.

Access to the nature reserve can be made from the Rising Sun Countryside Centre, located off Whitley Road (A191). The Centre is just a short walk from Palmerston Dene station and has a small visitors' car park, public toilets and a restaurant.



Blue Deer



Shore Crab



Rook Bunting



Common Gull

