

# Watercress Fields and Victoria Park

## Introduction

### *Victoria Park*

Victoria Park is a formal town park close to Ashford town centre, with the Great Stour on its northern boundary, large areas of close mown grass, and many mature ornamental trees. Despite its manicured appearance, it encompasses wildlife habitats that can be used for activities, including a pond, small wooded areas, and of course the river itself. Fauna and flora include a range of typical riverine species, as described under Introduction to the Green Corridors, along with other common species typical of town parks, such as squirrels and a range of common birds.

The history of the site is interesting. As the need for informal recreation increased with Ashford's growth during the 19th century, the park was created from land purchased for this purpose in 1898. Before this the land appears to have been used for sheep grazing; the park's boundaries have retained the shape of these old pastures. The park's best known heritage feature is the 'Hubert' fountain donated by a local art dealer in 1912 - it was not intended for this site, having been designed for the Great Exhibition. Lesser-known heritage features are the trees themselves - many were planted in the early part of the 20th century to commemorate important townspeople and various members of the royal family.

### *Watercress Fields*

Watercress Fields is a large open area of grassland alongside the River Great Stour, to the west of Victoria Park. The river here has very natural profile, with many meanders and good bank-side vegetation - it is a good wildlife habitat and educational resource. Large parts of this site are close-mown amenity grassland, but some areas have been sown as meadows. Small stands of trees have been planted to break up the large area of grass. The good quality of the river corridor here means that the range of riverine species is probably greater than along other urban reaches. Certainly the bank-side flora appears to be particularly good.

The site's name is the most obvious link to its land use history. The 1876 Ordnance Survey map shows a Watercress Farm here, with the main farm buildings in the vicinity of a modern street called Clockhouse. There is every possibility that watercress was commercially cultivated here (perhaps for London markets following the coming of the railway).

At the western end of Watercress Fields, there is a fording point, which seems to have been the crossing point of Beaver Lane before this area became built up and the nearby bridge was constructed. There are some wildlife-themed sculptures in this area.

## How to get there

Victoria Park:

From the town centre - via a footpath from Elwick Road

From the railway stations area - cross Beaver Road and following cycle/footpath through Bowen's Field (also in the Green Corridor).

Main entrance to park is off Jemmett Road.

Watercress Fields:

From Victoria Park - follow the main dual cycle/footpath (Stour Valley Walk) along the river.

From Brookfield Road - take the Stour Valley walk parallel to Leacon Road.

A number of roads in South Ashford also lead into these sites - Hillbrow Road, Cressfield, Bailey's Field, Ford Way, Cygnet Way.

## Facilities

There are toilets in Victoria Park, as marked on the site map.

## Locations for activities

See site map.

It Makes Sense:

These activities can be conducted anywhere but will work better in more varied parts of the sites.

**Habitat Explorers:**

Habitats encompassed by these sites are: pond, river, meadow, wooded areas.

**Marvellous minibeasts:**

There are meadows for sheet 1 in Watercress Fields. There are small wooded areas near the pond in Victoria Park, and blocks of planted trees alongside the river in Watercress Fields. The small pond in Victoria Park is ideal for pond dipping. River dipping would be best carried out at the ford in Watercress Fields.

**Who's Eating Who?:**

These activities can be conducted across the sites as a whole, but concentrating on areas with good wildlife habitat (close mown grassland won't yield many species)

**Down by the River:**

The river through Watercress Fields is probably better suited than that in Victoria Park. Use the natural meanders for sheet 2. There are particular points where access to the river is easier - the bays and the ford. They are marked on the site map.

**Site Maps**

The LNR boundary is shown in red. Please note these two maps are not to the same scale.

