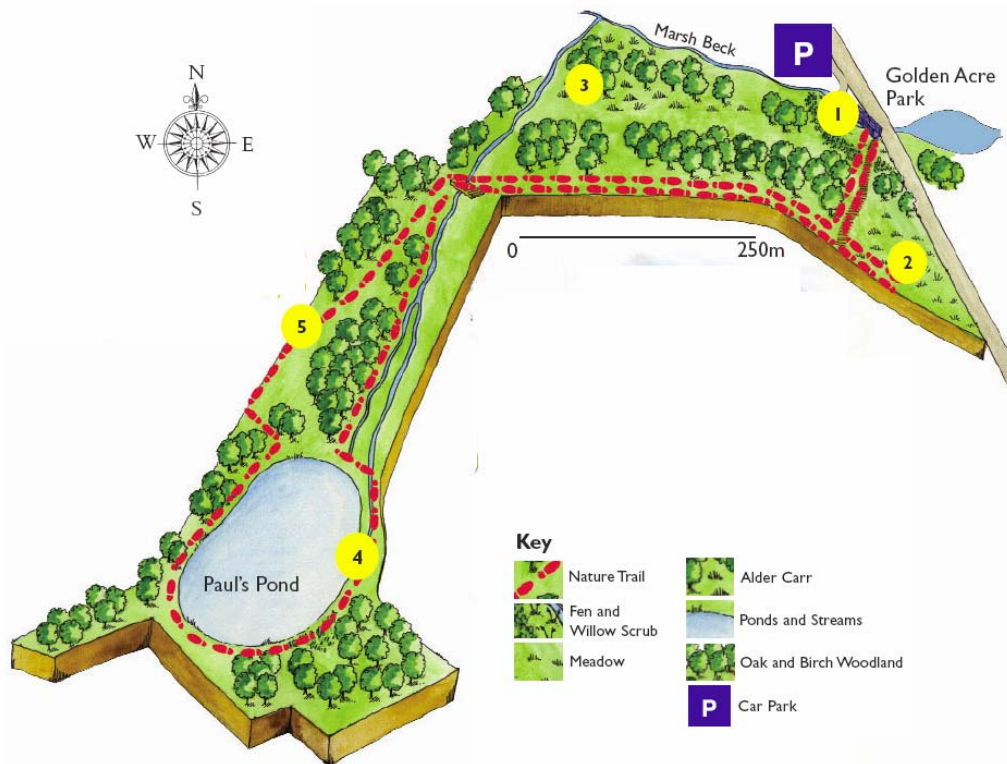


# Breary Marsh Local Nature Reserve Nature Trail



The Trail is about 2.5km (1.5 miles) long. Use this map to follow the numbered route around the site.

## 1 Fen and Willow Scrub

Walking into Breary Marsh from the car park, the first habitat you will notice is the fen. Fen is a habitat of wet fertile, peaty soil. Being rich in nutrients and well irrigated, fen is the ideal place for many plants and is dominated by tall lush vegetation including meadowsweet and great willow herb. If you look closer you may also see a number of smaller species including the yellow of marsh marigolds, the blue of water forget-me-nots and the gold of opposite leaved golden saxifrage.

Adjoining the fen is an area of willow scrub which is a valuable habitat in its own right, especially for insects and birds. However, left unmanaged, the willow would spread and encroach upon the fen.

## 2 Meadow

The meadow flowers mainly in the summer and is cut once a year for hay after the flowers have shed their seeds. Cutting in this way ensures the meadow is kept free of invading trees and shrubs and encourages grasses and wild flowers to flourish. The abundance of wildflowers and the nectar they produce attracts a multitude of feeding insects, including butterflies and bees.

### **3 Alder Carr**

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At this point you are surrounded by oak, birch and sycamore trees. If you look north, further into the woodland, many of the trees you can see will be alder, surrounded by the common reed – this habitat is known as alder carr.

Carr is the name given to woodland on wet or water logged ground dominated by alder. Beneath the trees, pools of standing water are dotted with large clumps of greater tussock sedge. These tussocks are home to some of the increasingly scarce insects which are found at Breary Marsh. Elsewhere the ground below the canopy is dominated by pools filled with cushions of sphagnum moss, or tall stands of reeds.

Alder was once valued for the charcoal produced from its wood, which was widely used in the production of gunpowder. More recently, the fertile land on which alder woods grow has been extensively drained and cleared for agriculture. Maintaining high water levels is critical in conserving alder woods, as drying-out allows the invasion of other trees and shrubs less suited to water logged ground.

### **4 Ponds and Streams**

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Freshwater habitats such as ponds, the water surface and muddy bottom, the shallows and margins, provide a range of micro-habitats – miniature environments – each with their own plants and animal inhabitants.

### **5 Oak and Birch Woodland**

Where the ground level rises, the woodland is drier and is dominated by oak, beech and sycamore. Both the beech and sycamore were planted in the early nineteenth century. In contrast, the birch, a natural coloniser, has established itself in the drier woodland. Because of the drier ground conditions and the different tree species, the range of plants and animals found here is noticeably different to those of the alder carr. Sedges, mosses and reed give way to carpets of bluebell, fern and creeping soft grass.