

FASCINATING WILDLIFE FACTS

Here are some fascinating facts about some of the city centre’s wildlife characters:

SWAN STATS

- > Swans have been in Bristol’s docks for at least 300 years!
- > They’re here all year, but numbers go up in winter, when birds fly in from as far away as Abbotsbury in Dorset to benefit from warmer waters and a guaranteed source of food.
- > Swans fly away to breed, because of a lack of suitable nest sites in the docks.
- > The success of last year’s breeding can be worked out by the number of young (grey/brown) birds around.
- > You can tell males from females by their bill – they’re brighter orange and have a larger black lump on top.
- > Swans sometimes crash land on Bristol Bridge, causing traffic chaos!

PIGEON POINTERS

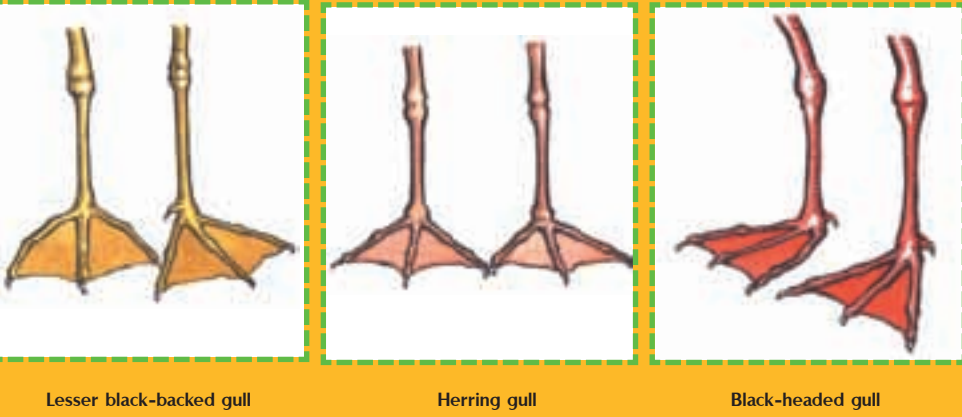
- > Bristol’s pigeons are some of the best documented in the world – being studied over the years by a keen local birdwatcher.
- > The biggest recorded flock was 440 birds in the centre.
- > People often feed pigeons in the same place year after year, and there are distinct flocks around the centre of Bristol – fed by local pigeon fans.
- > Pigeon courtship is flamboyant – the male ruffles his head and neck feathers and does a circle dance, often cooing to attract a feathered friend.

FISHY FACT

- > Pike, bream, roach, eel are all found in the cleaner water of the docks, as cormorants have discovered for themselves!

GULL GUIDE

- > The city’s gulls are some of the best monitored anywhere.
- > Roof top nursery. There are over 300 pairs of herring gulls and 900 pairs of lesser black-backs nesting on roof tops in and around the city centre.
- > Herring gulls are around all year. But most lesser black-backs head south in the colder months to Portugal and Africa, where a big attraction is the sardine industry and its rich pickings.
- > Black-headed gulls visit in winter. Over 500 can be seen in central Bristol. They roost at Chew Valley Lake, but commute to Bristol for food each day.
- > Gulls love to gobble scraps. But they also gather on grassy areas to ‘dance for their dinner’, feasting on worms brought to the surface, for a healthy alternative.
- > Confused? It’s easy. The legs have it! You can tell the difference between the gulls by their legs, lesser black-backed are yellow, herring are pink, and black-headed are red.



FLOWERS, FROGS AND FIDDLEDOCK

For a real wildlife hot-spot and the peace of the countryside right in the heart of the city Brandon Hill is the place to be. This is your chance to be dazzled by wildflowers, listen to a dawn chorus, fathom a fiddledock ...and refresh the spirit!

Use the pointers below to make your own WILD discoveries

- 1 City spinners** – The walls outside the Wildlife Trust office are a great place to spot another invader from the docks – this time with eight legs. Look for the funnel web of Mediterranean wall spiders that have set up home in the city.
- 2 A blast of song** – Take a wander through the woodland to hear chaffinch, song thrush, chiff-chaff and more besides. Early morning is your chance for a dawn chorus in the heart of the city. Listen for the bicycle pump sound – it’s a great-tit. Spring is best for bluebells too.
- 3 Wildflower heaven** – Walk through the meadow midsummer for the stunning array of colourful wildflowers – cowslips, oxeye daisies, knapweed and more besides. If you’re lucky you may see the marvellous marbled white butterfly.
- 4 Pond paradise** – Frogs, newts and toads love this spot – with dragon and damselflies, kingcups and yellow flag – we are sure you will too. Look for the frog’s eyes looking up at you.



Wildflowers Brandon Hill



Cowslip



Marbled White butterfly



Frog



Frogspawn



Bluebell

Rosy glow – Watch out for a large bumbling brilliant green rosechafer. They’re around in summer and attracted to the hill by the rose gardens of the next door QEH School.

Squirrel spotting – They’re tame and they’re cheeky – you can’t miss them. Squirrels were introduced onto Brandon Hill in the late 19th century (after 30 attempts) and are now thriving in the park.

5 Botanists bit – This rocky outcrop is home to some unusual plants. For the botanists amongst you, see if you can spot stag’s horn plantain, knotted hedge parsley and spotted medick.

6 Fiddledock – See if you can fathom a fiddledock. Shaped like a violin, these unusual plants grow around the hill. This is a good place to spot them.

SKIES ABOVE

You never know what you might see if you scan the skies. Peregrines, sparrowhawks and buzzards have all been seen over the city. In summer swifts soar above – they can often be seen feeding over Brandon Hill, listen for their screeching cries.



Fiddledock



Rosechafer beetle



Squirrel

KEEP WATCH

We hope the City Centre Nature Trail has inspired you to see the centre of Bristol in a new light. There is lots more to explore around and about the docks and city centre. We hope you will start to discover hidden green corners with their own bird song, stop and enjoy walls with wildflowers and start to marvel at the amazing lives of gulls soaring above you. If you take a bit of time out from the hustle and bustle you may be surprised and delighted by what you find!

GUIDE

CITY CENTRE NATURE TRAIL

DISCOVERING WILDLIFE IN THE HEART OF BRISTOL

CITY CENTRE NATURE TRAIL AND LOCAL AGENDA 21

The City Centre Nature Trail is contributing to Bristol’s Local Agenda 21 Strategy for sustainable development. The Strategy’s vision for biodiversity is: ‘to protect and increase the variety of wildlife in Bristol and ensure that everyone has access to and can enjoy wildlife in their everyday lives’.

AVON WILDLIFE TRUST

Avon Wildlife Trust is your local charity working to protect the wildlife in your area. Together with Watch, the junior wing, we are part of the Wildlife Trust’s partnership – the largest organisation in the UK concerned with all aspects of wildlife protection.



The Avon Wildlife Trust would like to acknowledge the support of Bristol City Council and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation for their sponsorship of the City Centre Nature Trail.

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PROTECTING WILDLIFE FOR THE FUTURE

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CITY CENTRE NATURE TRAIL

WELCOME to the City Centre Nature Trail!

This is your chance to see some amazing wildlife right in the heart of Bristol! From spectacular swans and raucous gulls, to Mediterranean spiders and colourful cosmopolitan plants. Discover more about Bristol's wonderful array of street-wise plants and animals, why they are here and where to find them.

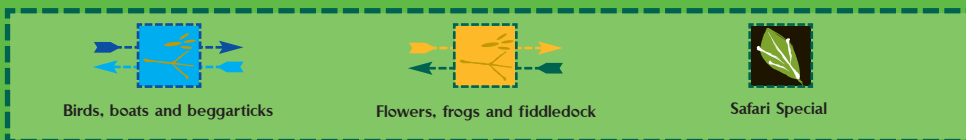
The trail is divided into two parts. Take your pick, you may like a watery wander around the docks **Birds, boats and beggarticks** or a hilly hike on Brandon Hill park **Flowers, frogs and fiddledock**.

You may like to do the whole trail or just visit one point. Whatever you choose, remember that to get the most out of the trail you will need enthusiasm, sharp eyes and patience... and don't forget, the ordinary can be extraordinary!

Why not use the Safari Special to make you own wild discoveries. Children will love these activities. Look out for the  symbol.

IN SEASON

Not everything will be visible all year round. For seasonal plants and animals we have indicated the best time to see them.

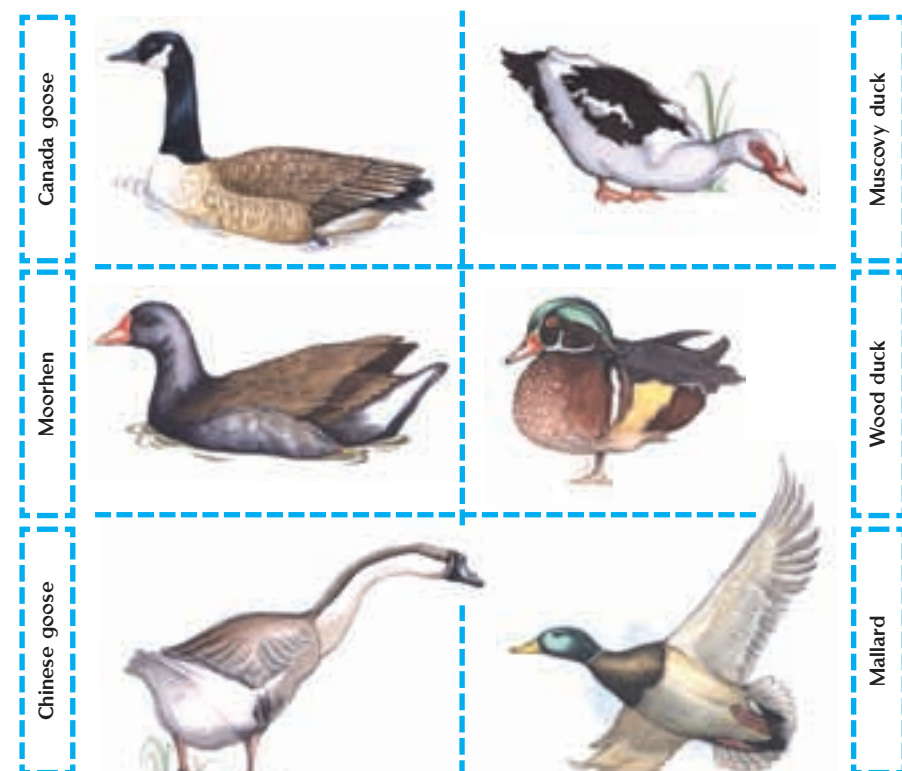


WHAT'S THAT DUCK? DUCK DECIPHER



A wander round the docks may leave you scratching your head at some strange looking ducks. Below are a few of the local characters. Keep watch too for the colourful mix of domestic ducks that have made the docks their home.

In very cold winters, when local reservoirs freeze, great-crested grebe, pochard, tufted duck and ruddy duck may also appear (we recommend you use a bird guide for these).



Bristol is famous for its swans, but here is your chance to discover the amazing story behind Bristol's raucous gulls, see a city centre starling spectacular, spot a cormorant and uncover exotic plants brought in through Bristol's historic seafaring trade.

For landlubbers, there are two routes, so take your pick. For a shorter stroll take the blue route. For a longer ramble choose the red route. But if you have your sea legs, why not take a ferry, use the information in the trail and see what you can spot from the water.

The trail shows you some of the best spots to see wildlife. But wildlife moves around – so keep watch as you go to increase your chances of seeing more.

1 City Centre – Pigeon picnic

The city centre is Bristol's Trafalgar Square. Over 200 pigeons feed here from scraps left by the many passers-by. They roost on the buildings and swoop down whenever a ready meal arrives, making them very efficient street cleaners!  They may look the same, but take a closer look, Bristol's pigeons come in a great mix of colours and patterns, three-quarters are light blue chequered, one-fifth dark or nearly black and just one or two percent mainly white or brown. See pigeon pointers to find out more.



City centre pigeons

2 Narrow Quay – Seagull stroll

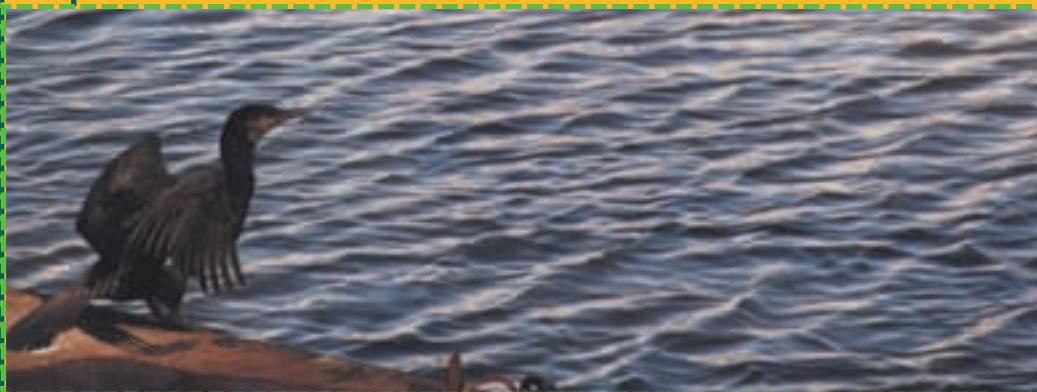
A good chance to test out your gull spotting skills, and see some spectacular fly-bys. Narrow quay forms a gull corridor between the centre and the docks, and gulls are always flying past or strutting around. Herring gulls and lesser black-backs are around all year. The more delicate black headed gulls just appear in winter.  Use our gull guide to see if you can spot the difference.



Lesser black-backed gull

3 Arnolfini – Cormorant Corner

This is a good place to spot a cormorant! These stunning large black birds can often be seen perched on boats and pontoons around here. They breed on Steepholt and spend a lot of time in the docks, swimming and fishing.  Keep an eye out, if you are lucky you may see them dive for fish – eels are a favourite.



Cormorant

4 Merchant's Quay – Duck deck

Cross the swing bridge. At the start of Merchant's Quay take a look back onto the bridge's circular swing wheel. This is a favourite resting area for ducks, geese and even moorhens.  If they are about, use our 'duck decipher' to see what you can spot. If you miss them here keep a look out on the rest of your walk along Merchant's Quay.



BIRDS, BOATS AND BEGGARTICKS

GOING BY BOAT

The Bristol Ferry Boat Company runs regular ferry trips around the docks. For further information  0117 9273 416.



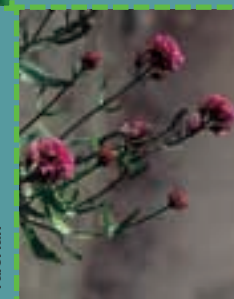
ACCESS

The city centre and docks area are mainly flat with no steps, but you will meet cobbles and kerbs. Paths on Brandon Hill are tarmacked but there are steep slopes and some steps.



Buddleia

Ivy leaved toadflax



Valerian

5 Redcliffe Wharf – Blooming buddleia

Buddleia thrives in Bristol. Its beautiful purple flowers can be seen growing out of many walls around the centre.

The walls here are a good buddleia spotting spot. Look out too for the fiery red flowers of valerian, a bold Mediterranean plant that is also at home here. Another wall lover is ivy leaved toadflax – its small lilac flowers twist and fire their seeds back into the wall, allowing it to spread around the city. All these plants are great for insects, with buddleia a butterfly's favourite.  How many butterflies can you spot?

6 Queen Square – Tremendous trees

The magnificent plane trees were planted about 150 years ago.  Look out for their striking camouflaged bark. These trees can resist pollution, helping them to survive city centre traffic fumes.

This is also a good place to sit and watch the antics of gulls and pigeons. If you are lucky you may spot other birds too. Keep watch for pied wagtails – these little black and white birds roost around the docks and can often be seen in winter.

7 Welsh Back – Swan city

This is the place to see Bristol's famous swans. Friends of Bristol Swans feed the swans from a pontoon along here. If you're lucky you may see the swans take off and fly past in spectacular formation. A record number of 145 birds was seen in December 1999.  How many can you spot in one go? See Swan Stats to discover more.



Swans at the Glass Boat Restaurant



P PARKING

FERRY

SHORTER STROLL BLUE ROUTE

LONGER RAMBLE RED ROUTE



8 Bristol Bridge – Starling spectacular

In autumn and winter Bristol Bridge is home to one of the city's last starling roosts.  Wait for dusk to see the birds flocking together and hear their chatter. They often perch on the spire of St Nicholas Church, before swooping down low to their roosting place beneath the bridge. Similar flocks used to be seen around the Hippodrome and at Temple Meads. Their disappearance reflects national declines in this once common bird.



Fig tree

9 Castle Park – Figure it out

As you enter Castle Park, take a second look at the tree growing out of the wall opposite Courage's Brewery. This is no ordinary tree – it is in fact a fig tree.  Look for its large distinctive leaves. Figs used to be brought into the docks through trade with the Mediterranean. It probably grew from a stray fig that germinated in the warm waters here. The dock is thought to have been warmed by water from the brewery.

10 Castle Park – Sparrow spot

This is the end of the trail and your chance to see one of the city centre's rarest birds – the house sparrow! Like starlings these cheeky birds used to be a common site in the city centre, but this is probably now the only place you'll get to see them.  Walk up and around the front of the old church you will hear the sparrows noisily chirping amongst the bushes. Why not take a rest and enjoy the herb garden full of fragrant flowers and bees?

BEGGARTICKS! We can't promise where you will see this unusual bushy plant with its bright orange flower. It's an annual and so moves around from year to year, flowering in later summer.

 Look on any floating pontoon, or bit of rough ground – it's about a metre high. It is a native of North and South America and was brought into the docks over 100 years ago – it has hung on ever since!



Beggarticks