

# North Tees

*Naturally!*

The Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership, delivering targeted action for our local wildlife

[www.teesvalleybiodiversity.org.uk](http://www.teesvalleybiodiversity.org.uk)



**Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership**

Produced by members of the Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership with funding from Tees Valley Wildlife Trust (Registered Charity No. 511068), Northumbrian Water Limited and RSPB



**NORTHUMBRIAN WATER**



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**Your guide to experiencing wildlife in North Tees**

**Experience the wild side of North Tees today:**

*Have new experiences*

*Meet unlikely neighbours*

*Try new challenges*

*Share new discoveries*

*Sounds good, doesn't it?*

*Find hidden treasures*

*Get closer to nature*

**North Tees has so much wildlife to discover. Some sites are big, with lots of different natural experiences and all the creature comforts you need for a great day out. Others are small and peaceful, perfect for tranquil walks and relaxation.**

Photos (clockwise from left): Carl Watts, Stockton Borough Council, RSPB, James Cianciaruso, Carl Watts, Hartlepool Borough Council, RSPB  
Background picture: Carl Watts

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# Go Seal Watching

With their big, brown eyes and charming dog-like faces, it's no wonder that seals are popular in the Tees estuary. Once you know where and when to look, you'll soon encounter our most charismatic aquatic mammal.

Pollution and hunting devastated Teesside's seals so that by 1930 they'd disappeared from the Tees. It took more than fifty years for them to return, but by the late 1980s, with a dramatic improvement in water quality, seals were seen once again. Today there are up to 70 common seals and 30 grey seals.

Seals can be seen throughout the year, peaking in numbers in July and August. There are five viewing areas. From the bird watching hides at Seal Sands, seals can be seen hauling out at low tide. Seals also haul out, mostly at high tide, on the mudflats on the southern side of Greatham Creek. You can see them from the A178 where the bridge crosses the creek. Seals are very sensitive to disturbance, so please do not approach them closely and respect them by watching quietly. Please do not park on this busy road - you can park at the National Nature Reserve car park only a few minutes walk away. Finally, see them at Billingham Beck (turning left off the A1032 just north of Newport Bridge) and at the Tees Barrage where they can be spotted most easily at high tide.

## Caring For Our Seals

The seals are closely monitored by the Tees Seal Research Programme, which is managed by the Industry Nature Conservation Association (INCA).

Help our seals to thrive by minimising disturbance. Please keep well away from their haul out sites and do keep dogs on leads. If you see a lone seal pup, its mother is probably not far away. Never approach a sick or injured seal as they can bite. Instead contact the RSPCA on 0300 1234555 or INCA on 01642 454953

There are public seal watches and walks throughout the year. Ring 01429 853325 for details.

A leaflet with information on Teesmouth's seals can be downloaded from the INCA website, [www.inca.uk.com](http://www.inca.uk.com)

Look for these symbols throughout this booklet - they describe the facilities you'll find at each location:

- |                          |                      |                                 |
|--------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| Easy access routes       | Car park             | Bridlepath on site              |
| Toilets                  | Cycle park           | Waymarked walks                 |
| Disabled toilets         | Cycle routes on site | Picnic tables                   |
| Cafe/restaurant          | Pushchair friendly   | Dogs under control welcome      |
| Baby changing facilities | Childrens playpark   | Organised events and activities |
|                          |                      | Volunteering opportunities      |

Photos: RSPCA (this page), Nigel Dobblyn (opposite page), James Cianciaruso (INCA)



# Saltholme,

## The Wildlife Reserve and Discovery Park

At Saltholme, you'll find yourself in a world full of amazing birds, stunning butterflies and special wildlife such as water voles and brown hares. Call in at the environmentally-friendly centre and try something tasty from the café. Then, drop into the shop for luxurious gifts, all kinds of bird food and maybe a new pair of binoculars.

Outside, there's the challenging adventure playground and the exciting Discovery Zone for pond dipping and monster hunts. Soak up the tranquillity of the wildlife garden or stretch your legs out on the reserve – there are both long and short walks

Above all, Saltholme's about enjoying yourself and having a great time surrounded by wildlife.



-  *Grab a pond dipping kit from reception and get close to monsters of the not-so-deep.*
-  *Pack a picnic and enjoy the great outdoors – picnic tables are provided in choice spots.*
-  *See massive flocks of birds scatter as peregrines hunt above them.*
-  *In the autumn, witness hundreds of starlings stealing the show with their afternoon roosts.*
-  *Warm up in the café with a bowl of homemade soup.*
-  *See the amazing colourful wildlife like yellow wagtails and dragonflies.*



Saltholme, the Wildlife Reserve and Discovery Park  
Seaton Carew Road, Port Clarence, Middlesbrough  
TS2 1TU  
01642 546625

[www.rspb.org.uk/saltholme](http://www.rspb.org.uk/saltholme)  
email: [saltholme@rspb.org.uk](mailto:saltholme@rspb.org.uk)

**Opening hours:** Open every day except Christmas Day.  
Open from 10am-5pm (April-October), 10am-4pm  
(November-March).

**Cost:** Come by bike, public transport or on foot and it won't cost you a penny - no matter how long you stay.  
Car parking £3 per car - but RSPB members get in free.

Photos: RSPB



Easy access routes and disabled access throughout Visitor Centre.



5



6

# Teesmouth

## - Seal Sands and North Gare

Teesmouth National Nature Reserve is a reserve of two halves. To the south is Seal Sands, one of the largest areas of intertidal mudflats on England's north-east coast. Over 20,000 water birds visit each year, making it an internationally important site for birdlife. When the tide is out, hundreds of waders, including redshank and dunlin, probe through the mud looking for protein-rich invertebrates. North of the estuary is North Gare with sand dunes and beach giving fantastic views across the estuary and to the North York Moors.



*Watch seals basking at low tide on the mudflats at Seal Sands from the comfortable observation hides.*



*Take a camera and capture the contrast of industry and wildlife.*



*In spring, watch ringed plover raise their young and see oystercatcher probe the mud for food with their distinctive long beaks.*



*Be amazed by the spectacular orchids that flower in dune grasslands in June and July.*



*Observe the magnificent passage of migrant birds in the Tees Estuary.*



*Make yourself cosy on a winter's day. Take a steaming flask of tea to one of the two hides. Watch knot, shelduck, teal and redshank make Seal Sands their winter home.*



### Natural England

Postal address: Natural England, c/o Hartlepool Power Station, Tees Road, Hartlepool TS25 2BZ

01429 853325/0300 060 1729

[www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk)

email: [northeast@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:northeast@naturalengland.org.uk)

Opening hours: Always open.

Cost: Free



Easy access footpath and observation hides wheelchair accessible

Photo: Carl Watts



# Seaton Common and Dunes

Just south of the seaside resort of Seaton Carew is Seaton Common and Dunes. The common, a wet grassland, which is grazed by cattle, is home to a vast number of resident and migratory birds. Relics of the once thriving salt industry, old ridge and furrow field patterns and the old sea wall can be traced on this open landscape. Across the golf course are Seaton Dunes.



-  Blow the cobwebs away in any season with a bracing walk through the dramatic dune landscape.
-  Take a camera and capture the big skies and wide views.
-  Seek out the attractive magenta blooms of the rare purple milk vetch which flowers in the dunes during July and August.
-  Get the whole family active and fly a kite on the beach, there is plenty of space for aerial dynamics!
-  In winter, feast your eyes on large flocks of birds including lapwing, fieldfare, curlew, shelduck and wigeon.
-  Scan the fence posts and telegraph poles for birds of prey. Kestrel, sparrowhawk and short-eared owl hunt over the common.



Photos: main picture, Hartlepool Borough Council; insets (top to bottom), Carl Watts, Robert Woods, James Gianclaruso

Hartlepool Borough Council

Postal address: Hartlepool Countryside Service, c/o The Gatehouse, Hartlepool Power Station, Tees Road, Hartlepool TS25 2BZ

01429 853325

[www.hartlepool.gov.uk](http://www.hartlepool.gov.uk)

email: [countrysidewardens@hartlepool.gov.uk](mailto:countrysidewardens@hartlepool.gov.uk)

Opening hours: Always open.

Cost: Free



# Portrack Marsh

Portrack Marsh is a surprisingly tranquil oasis for wetland wildlife situated on the northern bank of the River Tees, next to the Tees Barrage and surrounded by the major transport arteries of the Tees Valley. The rich mix of ponds, pools, reedbeds and wet grassland supports a wealth of birds, as well as harvest mice and many species of dragonfly and damselfly. The original marsh was damaged in the 19th century when the River Tees was straightened to allow larger ships to reach the port of Stockton. The wetland habitats have been carefully restored by the Tees Valley Wildlife Trust and Northumbrian Water Ltd.



*Wander along the network of easy access footpaths, which allow you to get close to the marshes without disturbing wildlife or getting your feet wet.*



*Go seal spotting along the riverbank footpath or at the Tees Barrage.*



*Wrap up warm in winter and spend a few quiet hours bird watching. Look out for redshank, teal, dunlin and shoveler.*



*In the summer, listen for the melody of the skylark. You may even hear a grasshopper warbler.*



*Pick a sunny day and pack a picnic to dine in the company of dragonflies and damselflies.*



*Walk part of the the Teesdale Way, which runs alongside the reserve.*



Photos: main picture, Rebecca Stanley; inset, Ken Smith

**Tees Valley Wildlife Trust**

Postal address: Margrove Park Heritage Centre,  
Margrove Park, Boosbeck, Saltburn TS12 3BZ

01287 636382

[www.teeswildlife.org](http://www.teeswildlife.org)

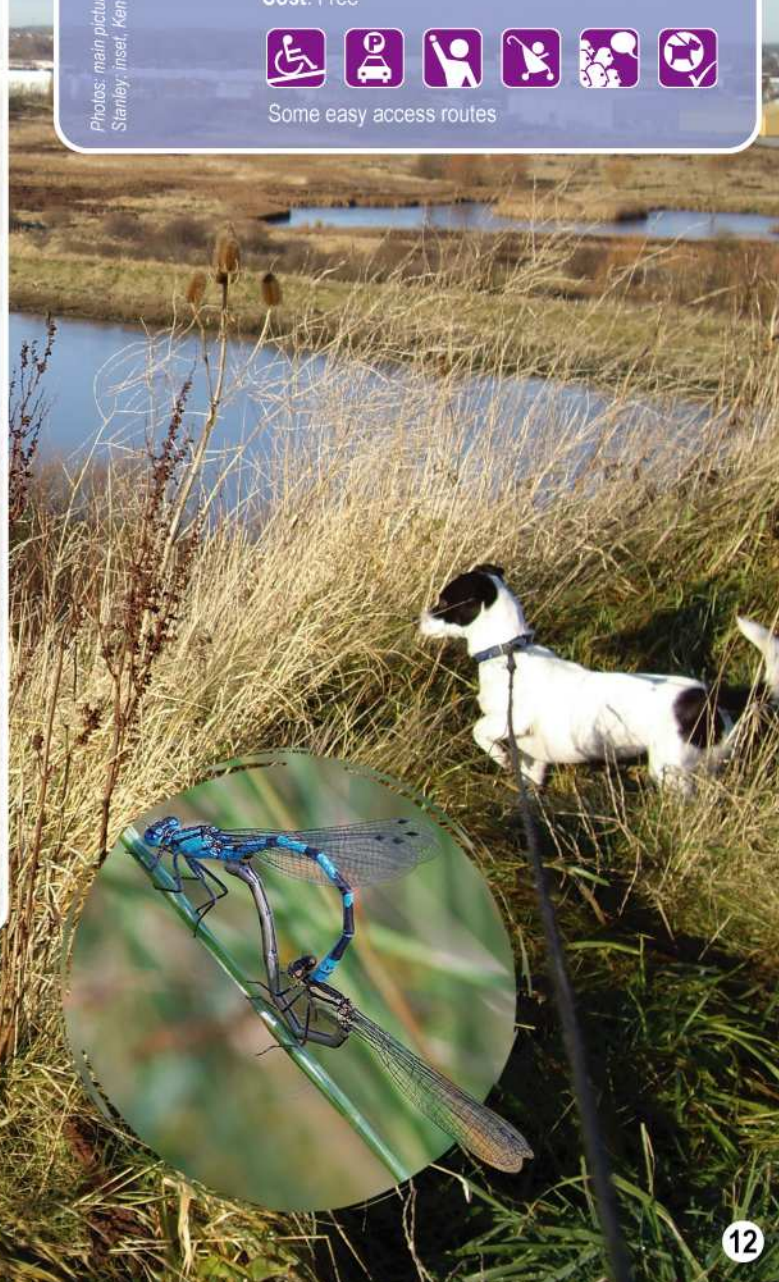
email: [info@teeswildlife.org](mailto:info@teeswildlife.org)

Opening hours: Always open.

Cost: Free



Some easy access routes



# Billingham Beck

## Valley Country Park

Billingham Beck Valley Country Park is a Local Nature Reserve. It is an oasis of wetland and woodland which is surviving in the heart of the Tees Valley. Its damp meadows, reedbeds, marshes and ponds are a haven for wildlife and for visitors. Countryside Rangers are based at the visitor centre which has displays and information about the wildlife which can be found on the site.



-  Follow the marked paths and keep a look out for kingfishers along the beck banks.
-  Pull on your wellies and explore the marshy grassland and reedbeds.
-  In summer, go flower spotting in the colourful meadows.
-  Watch dragonflies and damselflies as they whiz around the ponds on sunny days.
-  Explore the surrounding countryside. You can reach Wynyard Woodland Park by public footpath.
-  Try the orienteering course for a family challenge.



**Stockton Borough Council**  
 Billingham Beck Valley Country Park Visitor Centre,  
 Billingham, Stockton-on-Tees TS23 1RA  
**01642 360376**  
**www.stockton.gov.uk**  
**email: [billingham.beck@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:billingham.beck@stockton.gov.uk)**

**Opening hours:** Site always open. Car park open daily 8.30am-9pm (April-October, BST), 8.30am-4pm (November-March, GMT). Centre open Sundays (also Mondays and Fridays during school holidays), 10am-5.30pm.

**Cost:** Free



Photos: main picture, Stockton Borough Council; inset, Kerry Crooks

# Cowpen Bewley

## Woodland Park

This reclaimed industrial site has been successfully transformed into an attractive Country Park. A former clay pit now forms a picturesque lake, which is the focal point of the park. The young woodlands, ponds, wetland and meadow provide a diversity of habitats that are rich in wildlife, especially birds and amphibians.



-  Grab a pond net from the visitor centre and take a closer look at pond life.
-  Visit the bird hides to watch waterfowl on the lake - coot, pochard, mute swan, little grebe and tufted duck are resident with many types of summer and winter migrants visiting.
-  Watch carefully for signs of water vole, which have made the beck their home.
-  Try the orienteering course for a family challenge.
-  Get close up to birds at the bird feeding station.
-  Stretch your legs on a longer walk along the 4.5 mile Brickworks trail.



**Stockton Borough Council**  
Seal Sands Link Road, Billingham, Stockton-on-Tees  
TS23 3NF

01642 371633

[www.stockton.gov.uk](http://www.stockton.gov.uk)

**email:**

[cowpenbewley.woodlandpark@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:cowpenbewley.woodlandpark@stockton.gov.uk)

**Opening hours:** Site always open.

Car Park open daily 9am-9pm (April-October, BST),  
9am-5.30pm (November-March, GMT).

Centre open Sundays 10am-5.30pm (also Mondays  
and Fridays during school summer holidays)

**Cost:** Free



Photos: main picture, Stockton Borough Council;  
inset, Dan van den Toorn

Some easy access routes. Visitor Centre disabled access throughout.



# Nature's Calendar

Experience spectacles like these on a gentle spring morning or a hazy summer's day...

When it gets chilly, wrap up warm, pull on your wellies and experience wildlife spectacles like these...

Grab a pond dipping kit and get face-to-face with monsters of the not-so-deep.

Pack a picnic and dine in the company of dragonflies and damselflies.

Explore sand dunes and beaches.

Go seal spotting.

Look for brown hares boxing in the spring.

Marvel as swallows and sand martins swoop over the water in search of a tasty fly.

Stroll alongside wildflower meadows in full bloom.

Follow a butterfly or a bumblebee from flower to flower.

Embark on an orchid safari - many different orchids grow in the North Tees.

Enjoy the delightful sight of lapwing, mallard and moorhen chicks.

Spot a kingfisher with a silvery fish in its beak.

Head for higher ground and see bird migration as it happens.

Be amazed at starlings' aerial acrobatics as they flock together at dusk.

Watch for short-eared owls hunting during the day.

When it gets chilly, wrap up warm, pull on your wellies and experience wildlife spectacles like these...

Enjoy the golden glow of autumn as shrubs and trees slowly shed their leaves.

Damp autumn days are great for spotting all types of bizarre-looking fungi.

Watch thousands of ducks and geese dropping in for some winter sun.

Glimpse the ghostly white silhouette of a little egret.

Listen for noisy mixed flocks of tits, nuthatches and even woodpeckers.

Twigs and stems can be seen glistening with early morning frost.

Search the mud or snow for tracks left by badgers, foxes and deer.