

Hanningfield Reservoir Nature Discovery Park

Look up to the skies above, and gaze down on the earth below.

Isaiah 51:6

I recently paid a visit to Hanningfield Reservoir, one of my favourite Essex Wildlife Trust nature reserves.

The reservoir is surrounded by mature woodland full of wildlife. There are some beautiful walks through the woodland where you can stop off at the bird hides to view the large numbers of wildfowl on the reservoir, including tufted ducks and pochard in the winter, while in the summer you can watch the swifts, martins and swallows feeding over the water.



There is a trail guide available from the visitor centre to help you find your way round if needed. I don't know a great deal about birds, but I have often spent a happy half hour or so in the hides with my binoculars, enjoying the action on the reservoir. The bird identification posters in the hides help enormously if you don't know your gadwall from your pochard! The area is a Site of Special Scientific

Interest because of the numbers and diversity of wildfowl using the reservoir.

For younger naturalists there is a *Wind in the Willows Sculpture Trail*. This features wooden sculptures from the classic book which are spread around the reserve, and at each location you can take a brass rubbing of the animal which the sculpture depicts. Next to the visitor centre, there is the *Wind in the Willows Wildlife Garden* where you can visit Ratty's boat and Mr Toad's caravan.



The very attractive visitor centre has a good range of gifts for young and old, and it has several types of bird boxes, feeders and bird food on sale. It is also well stocked with binoculars and telescopes if you are looking to see the birds up close. The staff and volunteers are very helpful.

And then there is the café! It serves good quality tea, coffee and cakes, and a small but appealing range of sandwiches and snacks. There is a large seating area where you can look out over the water, and watch the birds feeding at the bird feeders just outside the window – plus the occasional cheeky squirrel.

For greater choice and something more substantial to eat, walk along the path to the other end of the reserve and there you come to Café on the Water. A lovely place to sit and watch the wildlife while grabbing a coffee or lunch. It has a children’s playground too!

As the Essex Wildlife Trust says, they are working to create a wilder Essex. And I quote:
 “We have entered the most vital decade for nature. We are dependent on the natural world in every aspect of our lives. The air we breathe. The water we drink. The food we eat. Our physical and mental

health. We need nature and we need wildlife.”

So if you have a spare morning or afternoon, do go and visit Hanningfield Reservoir, for a good dose of nature. The bluebells will be out soon.



You will find more information on the Essex Wildlife Trust’s website, about opening times, events, and the many children’s holiday and term-time activities that they run. Enjoy.
essexwt.org.uk/nature-reserves/hanningfield

Chris McFarland



To find out more or to share your ideas on Eco Church please go to the website www.allsaintsspringfield.org.uk/church-life/eco-church or speak to one of the Eco Church Group – Roger McFarland, Nicky Morecroft, Chris McFarland, Ian Poston, Dave Gauld, Beth Cornish, Ann Salmon.

This month’s eco suggestions

- **3Rs: reduce** how much we buy, **re-use** what we’ve finished with, and **recycle** what we can’t re-use
- **Go green with money** through ethical banking and savings – find out how at justmoney.org.uk