

Introduction

Hickling Broad is situated in the upper stretches of the River Thurne, and is the largest expanse of open water in the Broads system. NWT Hickling Broad is a National Nature Reserve, and its wide skies and open landscape offer the perfect place for a walk at any time of year. It is a haven for rare Broadland plants and animals, particularly bittern and swallowtail butterfly.

The Broads

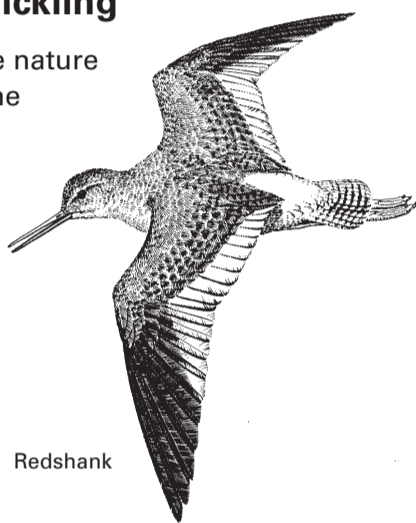
The Broads were hand-dug by local people in the Middle Ages as they excavated peat for use as fuel. These diggings later flooded, forming the unique network of marsh and fen now known as the Broads.

Flora and Fauna

See milk parsley, yellow flag iris and cotton grass here. Marsh harrier soar overhead, and hobby, water rail, Cetti's warbler and a wide range of water fowl are present. Swallowtail butterfly and a variety of dragonflies thrive here.

Trails around Hickling

All walks around the nature reserve start from the visitor centre. Parts of the trails may be wet and muddy at any time of year. No dogs please.



Redshank

2 Bittern Trail (red markers)

Follow the grassy path along the flood wall. This bank is a good place from which to spot swallowtail butterflies in summer. This largest of all British butterflies, with its stunning yellow and black livery, is unmistakable as it tumbles through the reeds. Keep an eye out for lizards basking in the sun. The observation hut appears ahead of you, through the reed, from which you have a lovely 360 degree view. As you sit in the quiet listen out for the characteristic 'ping' of the bearded reedling. Continuing along the trail turn left at Whiteslea Lodge and follow the stone track. In a short distance you will pass a path to the right which will take you to the Bittern hide, overlooking Hundred Acre Reedbed. The habitat here has been improved considerably over recent years and now boasts breeding bittern again. If you are lucky you may see one of these rare birds flying by. Look out for heron feeding at the water's edge. Marsh harrier soar overhead and hobby hunt for dragonflies.

From here continue along the stony track to the visitor centre. The grazing marshes on either side of the track provide nest sites for lapwing and snipe, and are grazed by Konik ponies and cattle to maintain their wildlife interest.



Bittern

NWT Hickling Broad NNR

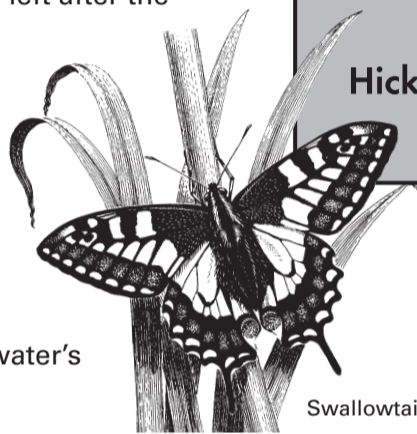
1 Swallowtail Trail (green markers)

From the visitor centre, follow the path through the picnic area and take the left fork past the trail map. The path now runs between two dykes, with gorse, birch and oak growing on their banks, then out into the reedbed. During summer, reed buntings and warblers flit around the reedbed on either side of you searching for food. Cross the large dyke and enter Cadbury hide, which overlooks an artificial pool or 'scrape' which attracts wading birds such as redshank and snipe.

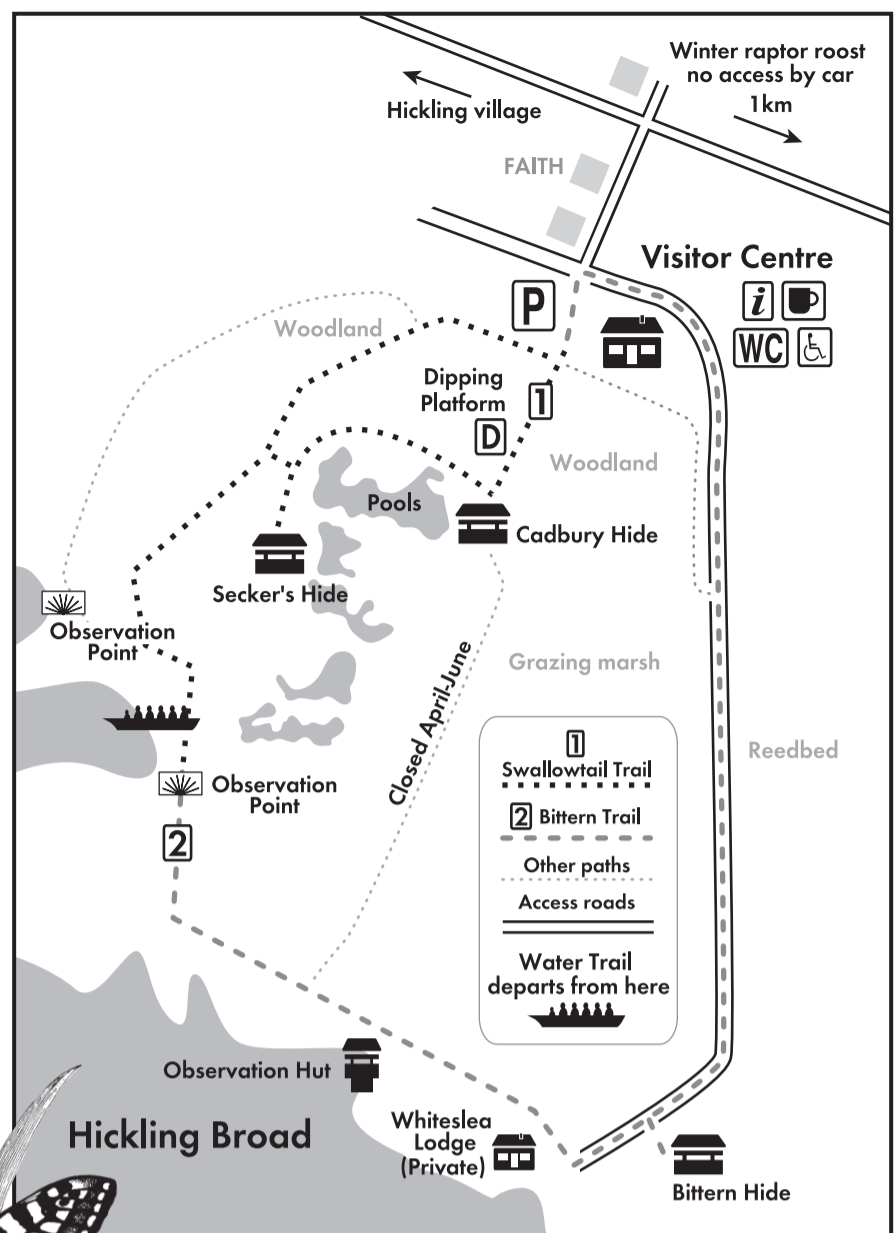
Continue along the path to Secker's hide. The water in the scrape here is deeper and the waterside vegetation taller, making it ideal for waterfowl and bittern.

Follow the boardwalk through the reedbed bearing left after the bridge. This is a good place to see signs of otter.

The boardwalk takes you to an observation platform at the water's



Swallowtail



edge from where you can enjoy wide views of the Broad. Wheelchair access ends here. You may return to the visitor centre the way you came or pick up the Bittern Trail at this point.

Visiting NWT Hickling Broad NNR

The nature reserve is open all year with the visitor centre open from Easter to September daily, 10am – 5pm. There is a small charge for non-NWT members to enter the reserve. Interpretive displays, refreshments, gifts and natural history books are all available at the visitor centre, which also has toilet facilities. There is wheelchair access along the Swallowtail Trail and to the visitor centre. Grid ref: TG 428 222. Postcode: NR12 0BW.

Boat Trips

Electric powered boat trips at Hickling Broad take you across open water, passing reed beds and grazing marshes where you will spot wildlife in its natural habitat. Beautiful dragonflies, spectacular marsh harriers, and a variety of other water birds and Broadland wildlife may be seen. There is also the opportunity to climb a 60ft tree tower and visit bird hides only accessible by boat. Either one or two hour trips can be booked at the visitor centre or by phoning 01692 598276. Booking is recommended to avoid disappointment.

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National Nature Reserve



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