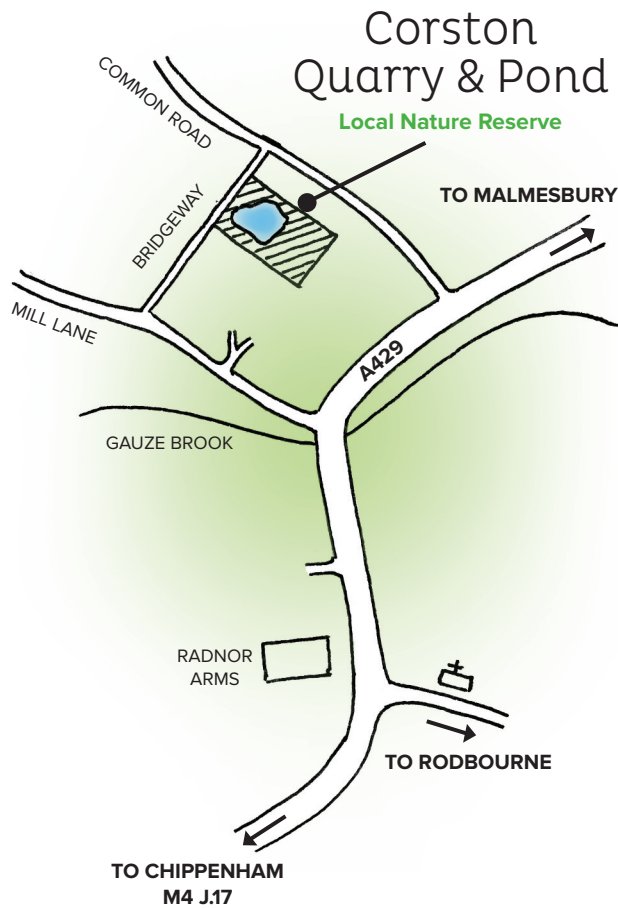


## How to Get Here



The access to Corston Quarry and Pond Local Nature Reserve is from the bridleway between the Common Road and Mill Lane. There is no parking. Please help us care for this place and keep it special. In particular, please keep your dog under control and clean up after it, for the safety of other visitors.



# Corston Quarry & Pond

## Local Nature Reserve



The production of this leaflet was funded through a generous grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.



A nature reserve managed for  
and by the local community

**Corston Quarry and Pond Local Nature Reserve was given to Malmesbury St Paul Without Parish Council in 1995 to be managed for the benefit of people and wildlife for ever. Despite its small size the reserve is surprisingly rich in wildlife and was legally designated as a Local Nature Reserve in 2005. It lies on the edge of the village of Corston, 3 km south of Malmesbury.**

The quarry was first worked after 1900. The rock that was dug out is oolitic limestone, formed from shell fragments, marine sediment and small round grains that grew in size as they were gently rolled to and fro by the waves in the shallow sea.

The stone was of variable quality. The top layers were crushed to surface cattle yards and field entrances. The stone at the base was thicker and more durable, and may have been used for local buildings and stone walls.

The quarry stopped operating during the 1950's, the site was abandoned and left to natural colonisation by plants and animals. The deeper parts filled with groundwater to become a large pond with shallow rock edges, surrounded by limestone grassland rich in wild flowers, bushes and trees.

## The Pond

The pond is shallow but never totally dries out and the water quality is very good, making this an important habitat for aquatic life. Cyperus sedge forms clumps around the edges, growing with water mint and gypsywort, while broadleaved pondweed and stonewort are the main floating vegetation. These plants are very important for dragonflies and damselflies, which lay their eggs on the leaves, and for amphibians such as newts and toads.

Toads have a strong migratory instinct, following the same route back to the pond they were born in, returning on mild, damp evenings in late February / early March. Females wrap long strings of eggs around emergent plants. Toad tadpoles group together in shoals, and toadlets emerge from the pond in early summer, usually after heavy rain. They spend the rest of the year in gardens or under stones and logs.

In summer the air is alive with colourful dragonflies and damselflies, hunting for smaller insects and laying their



eggs. They spend most of their lives in the pond as nymphs, where they are fearsome predators and can eat their own weight in food in 30 minutes! Damselflies can be distinguished from dragonflies as they fold their wings when resting. The emperor is our largest dragonfly, its bright blue and green colours making it very obvious as it hunts over the pond. Flying at up to 40 mph to hunt, emperor dragonflies rarely settle, even eating their prey in flight.

Pond skaters use surface tension to “walk” on the water, and whirligig beetles are easily identified by their shiny black colour and unmistakable circling behaviour. The water teems with tiny water fleas and backswimmers, so-called because they swim upside down.

## The Limestone Grassland

**Limestone grassland has become rare, so relic areas such as Corston quarry are now a vitally important habitat for wildflowers and butterflies.**

The grassland is rich in wildflowers with primrose and cowslip in spring, followed by black knapweed, field scabious and ladies bedstraw, once used for stuffing straw mattresses because the dried flowers act as a flea repellent. Bird's foot trefoil, ox-eye daisy and ground ivy colour the turf in summer, with taller herbs such as perforate St John's wort, great mullein, prickly teasels and the yellow-flowered common fleabane. Bee orchids can sometimes be seen. Yellow rattle is an important because it is semi-parasitic on grasses and reduces their vigour, allowing other less competitive species to thrive.

Slow worms are occasionally found. They are actually lizards without legs, and are cold blooded so they have to bask in the sun to get warm. The uncommon glow worm can be seen on warm nights in June and July. The males can fly but the females cannot, so they make their abdomen glow brightly in summer to attract a mate. Several species of butterflies feed on the flowers including meadow brown, ringlet and small tortoiseshell.



## Trees and Shrubs

The trees and shrubs provide shelter, nesting habitat, and berries for wintering birds, but need to be kept in check to stop them from invading the grassland. Sycamore and ash need to be removed because they set so much seed. A few graceful silver birch trees provide autumn colour, while the mature willows provide pollen for bees in early spring. Alder buckthorn has shining black berries in autumn and is an important food plant for the beautiful yellow brimstone butterfly, often the first to be seen in spring.

Long-tailed tits visit the reserve, often with blue and great tits. Green woodpeckers, known as the yaffle because of their loud, laughing call, sometimes visit the anthills. If you are lucky you may see moorhen which nest in the margins or on the island.

An old badger sett in the far corner is sometimes occupied by foxes, attracted by the rabbits, which are important because they graze the grassland, keeping it short so that wildflowers can thrive.

## Management

The nature reserve is managed by local people, who carry out regular tasks to keep the site in prime condition for visitors and wildlife. The reedmace (or bulrush) needs to be controlled so that it doesn't invade the whole pond. Trees and bushes sometimes need to be removed to keep the grassland open for the benefit of the wildflowers, butterflies and uncommon species such as the glow worm.



Corston  
Quarry & Pond  
Local Nature Reserve

### Photographs were provided by:

Steve Day: Large red damselfly  
Darin Smith: Toad  
Raymond Blythe: Glow Worm  
Stephen Davis: Ladies Bedstraw  
All other photographs: Ann Skinner