



**GET
INVOLVED
TODAY!**

Creating Natural Connections

St Maurice's Pond Activity Booklet



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ST MAURICE'S POND WALK AND ACTIVITY PACK



How to get there : Adjacent to St Maurice's High School
Westfield, G68 9AG. Parking on site accessed via North
Road

Description : An easy walk over tarmac, gravel and dirt
paths. The path is narrow in places and mostly flat though
there is one short section of steep path.
The circular route is around 1km long (approx. 1500 steps)

What to see : A great site for birds – particularly
waterfowl. Wildflowers, orchids, dragonflies and
butterflies in the warmer months.

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A little bit of background about.... **ST MAURICE'S POND**

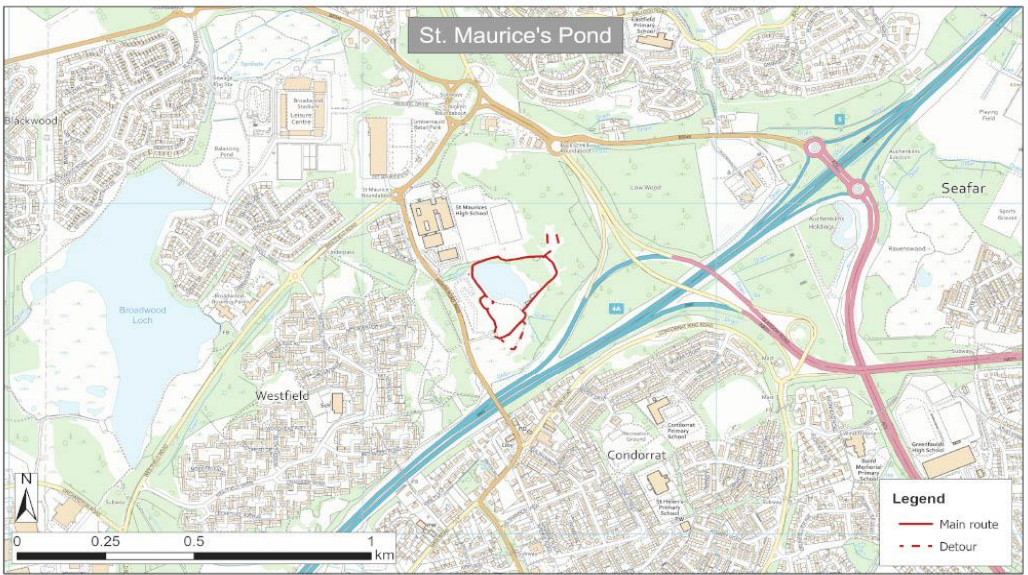
St Maurice's Pond is managed by North Lanarkshire Council and is known as a 'SINC' (Site of Interest for Nature and Conservation). Historically the area was worked as a quarry and as farmland, but the site as we know it today – including the pond – is mostly human-made.

That doesn't take away from the natural beauty of the site, however. This is a wonderful place to see a wide range of plants and wildlife. Cumbernauld Living Landscape is also working hard to improve the site. Our volunteers, school groups and Wild Ways Well participants have all contributed to helping improve access and make the area better for wildlife – and people. In this pack you'll find a guided walk, activities to help you discover and engage with the area and information about the area. You can take part in as much or as little as you like (and the activities will work anywhere, not just at St Maurice's!)

Engaging with nature is one of the best things we can do for our health and wellbeing.

If you do decide to follow the walk or take part in any of the activities in the booklet, why not let us know how you get on on!

Twitter: @WildCumbernauld Instagram: @WildCumbernauld
Facebook: Cumbernauld Living Landscape



Scottish Wildlife Trust
Harbourside House
110 Commercial Street
Edinburgh, EH6 6NF

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ST MAURICE'S POND WALK

Start your walk in the car park at the entrance to St Maurice's Pond. This is a circular walk so technically you can go round in either direction, but for the purposes of this guide we are going to suggest you walk anti-clockwise starting at the southern side (the side furthest away from the school). The walk will follow the path for the most part though there are a couple of optional detours you can take which will involve getting your feet muddy!

The first thing to spot on your walk is right here in the car park, in the middle of the circular space you'll see a piece of brightly coloured farm equipment – reminding us of the area's heritage and past use as farmland. The current pond is a relatively new addition – it doesn't appear on Ordnance Survey maps until after 1969 – though there were other ponds nearby and the site is likely to have always been quite wet. There were always quarries in the area and the land was reprofiled when the M80 was built so people have always had a big impact here.



The first thing you might notice when you begin your walk might be the difference in habitat on the left and right-hand sides of the path. To your right, it's all short grass – the type you often find in public parks designed to be used by people for all sorts of things, from walking the dog to picnicking or playing games. This sort of grassland is great for us, but it doesn't offer much for wildlife because it is almost all just a few species of grass, so there is very little food and almost no cover or shelter for animals to use.

On the left-hand side of the path, the grass has been allowed to grow longer and has been seeded with wildflowers. This area is being managed as a meadow. The plants here are designed to appeal to all sorts of wildlife from insects to small mammals and birds. It might look like it has just been left to go wild, but it's actually surprisingly difficult to look after wildflower meadows properly – they don't just appear on their own and if they aren't carefully managed the flowers will be quickly swamped by grass, shrubs and trees.

Take some time as you walk to TAKE NOTICE of this area. Look carefully and see if you can spot signs of some of the many forms of life which live here. Start at the tops of the tall plants and grasses and look for differences – the way their leaves and stalks are formed, any remaining seedpods or flower heads, which have survived the winter frost, different shapes, forms and textures. Run your hands through them and feel the different textures. Look all the way down to ground level – some of the plants which grow here are tiny.



Next, see if you can see some any signs of insects and invertebrates. Are there any spider webs stretching between plants? They can look amazing first thing in the morning, wet with dew or glittering frost. Carefully peek under leaves and flower heads and look closely. Lots of small creatures will tuck themselves away into these spaces to survive the winter – be gentle and try not to disturb anything but see if you can spot any.

Now take your view right down to ground level: small ‘tunnels’ through the undergrowth can be a sign of tiny mammals like mice and voles, which create these runs to help them move around without being seen by predators. Bundles of grass can be dry, cosy nesting spots. Larger trails, marked by broken plants might be made by larger mammals like foxes or, this close to the path, maybe by dogs running off the lead!

If you come back in summer, this area will be full of colourful flowers and different grasses, each providing food and habitat for pollinators like moths, butterflies and bees. In autumn, the seed pods will, likewise, be food for birds and small mammals. Our volunteer groups play a big part in maintaining these meadows using traditional techniques – you can find out how to get involved elsewhere in this pack.

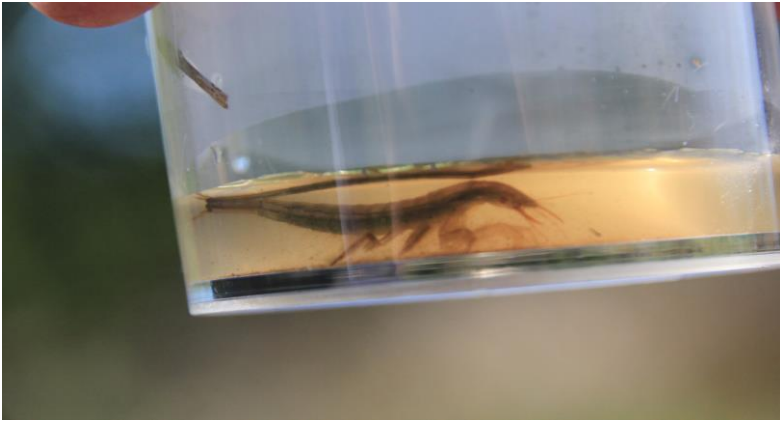


Continue your walk by following the path down towards the pond – you can take an optional detour at this point if you like, head over the short grass until you reach a line of small trees running parallel to the path. These are native fruit trees which were planted by our volunteers and will, hopefully, one day be the basis of a small orchard. In amongst the apple trees, there are also soft fruits like raspberries and the ground is seeded with wildflowers.

Once you get to the pond, you'll see the boardwalk which leads out over the water. The boardwalk was replaced in 2019 as part of Cumbernauld Living Landscape's role to improve access to natural areas. You can read more about it elsewhere in the pack. For now, take a walk out over the water.

The pond is shallow in this area – in fact it is slowly drying out as the vegetation expands. This is a natural process for all ponds and the decision about whether to interrupt it will be one that will have to be taken in the future. Take a moment to stop and think about this. What is your opinion? Should the pond be allowed to continue to develop naturally even if it means it slowly disappears? Or should we intervene and try to 'freeze' time and keep it as it is – even if it is expensive and difficult to achieve?

In warmer months, we use this boardwalk for pond dipping, bringing school groups here to investigate the ecology of the pond. Pond dipping is fun – but the types of animals that we find tell us a lot about the health of the pond and can alert us to problems, hopefully in time to fix them. On past sessions, we have found dragonfly, damselfly and cased caddisfly larvae, water beetles, newts and even small fish. Finding these creatures tell us that the water is clean, and the pond is healthy.



In summer, this area is alive with dragon and damselflies, in winter their larvae live beneath your feet as tough, deadly and efficient underwater predators.

Once you're over the pond, you'll see the habitat around you changes. Now you are walking through an area of mature mixed woodland. The paths here have also been improved to help encourage people to access them but keep your attention on the woods around you. Buzzards are often seen soaring over this area and a pair nest nearby most years. In the trees around you are foxes, roe deer, even badgers but you'll be very lucky indeed to see any of these elusive mammals – they're used to hiding from all the people and dogs which use the area. Put yourself in their shoes (or paws!) for a moment. How do they live their lives in such a busy area? Where do you think they shelter during the day, where do they find food and water?

You can cut through the woods here to your left along some rough trails and walk parallel to the pond – watch out though, these are informal paths, and they can be difficult to get along. Otherwise, stay on the path and keep following it as it loops gently uphill and turns north. The area to your right is pretty wet and this hints at the site's likely 'natural' state were it to be left unmanaged. It would be a network of shrubs, grass, marsh, shallow ponds and small trees.

Over the years, our volunteer groups have done a lot of work in this area removing invasive non-native species (INNS) – including successfully clearing the area of *Rhododendron ponticum*. 'Rhody' is a great example of a problem invasive plant. It spreads rapidly and grows quickly but it provides almost no benefit to native wildlife as very few species can eat it, and it prevents native plant species from growing.



Keep an eye on the drainage ditch which runs along the side of the path, it's a great place to spot frogs and toads and in spring and summer lots of specialist wildflowers which like this wet ground. You can also sometimes spot the signs where mammals cross it – look for footprints of deer and foxes in the wet mud where an animal trail cuts across.

Eventually you'll come to a fork in the path – you can take an optional detour off to the right up into the grass and trees which run behind St Maurice's High. This area is a good spot to find pearl-bordered fritillary butterflies in late spring and early summer. These beautiful little butterflies are in rapid decline and are a UK priority species for conservation. They are a part of North Lanarkshire's Biodiversity Action Plan and sites like St Maurice's are vital for their future.

Take the fork to the left and stay on the main path and you'll soon find a pile of rocks on one side of the path and an area of woodland on the other. The rocks are the remains of one of the drystone walls which are found all over the site - and which once marked farm boundaries. Carefully try lifting one of the stones and feeling its weight – the stones here have high concentrations of iron in them making them very heavy, it must have been some job building all the local walls with them!

The clearing in the trees on the left is another area where we often bring school groups to use the woods as an outdoor classroom. There are all sorts of lessons that can be learned in the woods from confidence, team building and life skills to more formal lessons like biology, geography, maths, physics – even languages and art. As well as students we are also able to bring teachers here to run CPD sessions, passing on skills that they can use to take their own pupils outdoors.

Continue following the path back around the pond passing through trees and small areas of clearing and long grass. This patchwork of habitat is perfectly suited to a wide variety of species. Keep your eyes out for woodland birds, colourful fungi, lichens and plants.

Look to your left for glimpses of the water – the local grey herons love to hang around in the shallows here, silently stalking fish, amphibians and even small mammals at the pond's edge. The path is quite narrow here and it descends steeply in one section so watch your footing. You'll see the path crosses a small stream – underneath the surface a drainage sluice helps to maintain the pond's level.

Clearing this sluice out and collecting litter from the stream is another frequent task of our volunteers. Later in the year, this section of path can be covered with frogs and toads, especially at night. Bats are also frequently spotted here including the amazing Daubenton's – sometimes known as the 'water bat'. Daubenton's are incredible hunters, skimming low over the water and scooping up invertebrates with their tails.

As you emerge from the trees you might see a bench just over the grass to your right. This is one of our 'banter benches'. It was designed by students from St Maurice's High who wanted a place where they could sit and talk while looking out over the water. This is a great time to take a detour and a quick rest. If you've brought a flask of tea or coffee, now is the time to drink up! It would also be a great place to sit and get creative by composing a Haiku... more on that elsewhere in the pack.





LIVING LOUNGE
ST. MAURICE'S POND





You're on the final leg now!

Walk along the water's edge and look for the amazing variety of bird life which calls the pond home. Take a careful look, there are more species out here than you might think at first glance... mallards, coots, moorhens, little grebes, tufted ducks and even goldeneye ducks are regularly seen here.

Overhead you might spot black-headed as well as common, black-backed and herring gulls. A pair of mute swans attempt to raise a family here most years and they are much loved by the local people. The pond isn't big enough to support a full family of swans, and there are many tales told of the swans stopping traffic on the main road, as they carefully troop their cygnets over to Broadwood Loch every year.

The swans normally use a small island just offshore but, as the pond dries, this island is becoming easier to reach, especially by dogs – so it is important to keep dogs on a leash around this area during the breeding season, if the swans are scared off their nest it can be fatal for the young birds.



The path forks again here.....you can keep walking straight ahead, if you like, it will rejoin the main path at the Boardwalk up ahead but we're going to turn right and follow the route back towards the car park. We're going to pass through another area of wildflower meadow – this section is wonderful for orchids in summer, putting on an amazing show. There's just something special about orchids and their mysterious life cycles that never fails to amaze. There are paths mown through the grass by North Lanarkshire Council's ground maintenance teams and it's always worth a wander along them.

The path cuts through the line of trees – which are regularly cut back by our volunteers to keep the path open – and you have meadow on either side of you here as you approach the car park. This is one of the spots where our Nature Ninjas took part in training in the use of scythes for meadow management. Sometimes the old ways really are the best!

You are back at the car park now. Take some time to reflect on your walk and think about all the things you've seen. Daily exposure to nature like this is vital for our health and wellbeing. On today's walk, you'll have covered about a kilometre or about 1500 steps. It doesn't sound that far but St Maurice's Pond shows that you can pack a lot of nature into a small space!

MEADOW MANAGEMENT AT ST MAURICE'S POND



MEADOW MANAGEMENT AT ST MAURICE'S POND

St Maurice's pond is one of the most spectacular sites our volunteer groups work at. This wildflower meadow is teeming with life in the spring and summer months: all manner of wildflowers, bees and butterflies populate the grassland. Wildflower meadows need 'sustained management' to be sustainable. Left alone meadow grasses would grow and rot repeatedly in place. The breakdown of grass creates a high level of nutrients in the soil. High nutrients are quickly gobbled up by a small subset of wildflowers – nettles, dock and thistles, high nutrient lovers. To avoid an endless loop of high nutrient soils, we require.... volunteers!

Cutting once a year and – crucially - lifting the cut grass and displacing it elsewhere, lowers nutrients in the soil. Low nutrient soils mean an explosion of wildflowers; the colours and the wildlife that use them. Without a proliferation of wildflowers, we would not get rare butterflies visiting the meadow such as the small pearl-bordered fritillary and small blue.

We reseed meadows with a special flower – yellow rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*). This flower is a parasite and attacks the roots of common grasses. This is crucial in allow slower growing wildflowers to grow in greater numbers. Listen out for their distinctive rattle if you are at the meadow in late summer, when the seed pods are dry!

Cutting this grass takes people power, but it can be incredibly fun and rewarding using less-polluting tools, such as scythes. These ancient tools require skill and are great for core exercise. In normal times we frequently hold scything workshops: training people in the use and maintenance of these tools.

The park is incredibly popular. It is always an attraction with the amazing wildlife and views on site. This means it can often be busy and can at times fill up with litter. If you are looking to help with its upkeep, then why not invest in a litter picker or a pair of tough gloves? This would make it safer to dispose of some of the litter that can be present at the park.

ST MAURICE'S POND TREASURE TRAIL

How many of the following things can you spot on your walk?

- The plough sculpture **1 point**
- The 'Welcome to St Maurice's Pond' rock **1 point**
- The BMX track **1 point**
- The pink butterfly bench **1 point**
- A stream **2 points**
- A tree with berries **10 points**
- A mallard duck **5 points**
- A mute swan **5 points**
- A moorhen **10 points**
- A coot **10 points**
- A bulrush reed **2 points**
- The Boardwalk **2 points**

Total



Welcome Rock



Coot



Bulrush reed



Mute swan



Boardwalk

SPECIES SPOTTER

Common sights to see now?

Heron



On the Pond!

Look for black, grey and white feathers and long beak, legs and neck.

These birds can be seen wading through water, standing hunched or spreading their 2m wingspan through the air, which can be confused for the wings of a bird of prey.



Buzzard



In the sky!

Although they may vary in shades of brown, look for a fanned-out tail, white under the wings with dark wing tips.



Common to see along motorways, these birds are often seen circling above tree lines.

Mallard



On the pond!

The male mallard has a bottle green head with a broad yellow bill.



The female is mostly brown, which camouflages her well.

Both have a matching blue/purple stripe on their wing that's encased by white, that is only just visible when their wings are tucked away.

Coot



On the pond!

All black bird with white beak. Bigger than the moorhen.

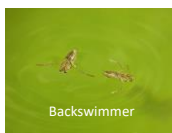
Listen! These little bird can be quite noisy before take off.



Backswimmer & Water Boatman



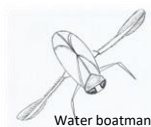
In the pond!



But be careful you don't fall in! It can be icy underfoot and the water will be cold!

Look for their paddle-like limbs.

Although the pond might be frozen these little creatures build up sugars in their body that acts as antifreeze. They also carry air bubbles to dive deep into the pond.



Goldfinch



In the trees!

Golden little birds with a red face, white chest and noticeable gold strip on their otherwise black wing with white streaks. Watch them eat their way through teasel and thistle in the late summer months.



SPECIES SPOTTER

Others to spot

Magpie

☐

Blue Tit

☐

Scots Pine

☐

What else do you see (make a note):

What to look for in spring and summer:

Wildflowers



Frogs



Dragonflies



June - September

Pond skaters



April - October

Marsh orchid

May-July



March- October

CREATE YOUR OWN NATURE HAIKU

What is a Haiku?

Haiku is a short form of poetry originally from Japan. A traditional Haiku has 17 syllables divided into lines of 5, 7 and 5 syllables. Haikus are a way of looking at the world and seeing something deeper. Haikus do not need to rhyme but they can do if you want.

Nature haiku examples:



Fire our oldest friend,
In the forest burning bright,
Gift of warmth and light..



Wise, blacker than night,
Lands upon crisp winter floor,
Not a leaf in sight.

NATURE COUNTDOWN GAME



Number of people: Two or more

Where to play: This game can be played on the grass or in the woods at St Maurice's Pond. Alternatively, there is a large tree at the end of the boardwalk that you could form a circle around.

Materials needed: None

How to play:

- Everyone stands in a circle
- One person comes up with a nature category (example: types of trees, birds, flowers).
- Each player has ten seconds to come up with an answer that fits into that category.
- Going around the circle each person calls out their answer, (each answer may only be called out once) while the group counts down from ten.
- If a player can't come up with an answer before the countdown runs out, then they are out of the game. The last player left is the winner.



FIND A SPECIAL SPOT

For this activity, we're going to ask you to find a special spot in the outdoors. Your spot will be unique to you but ideally it should be somewhere that grabs your interest, or somewhere peaceful that you feel you can relax. It should also be in as natural a place as possible.

Once you find your spot you need to ideally sit (though you can do this standing too) and be as quiet and still as possible.

Take a few moments to breathe deeply and slowly. Examine how your body feels and how your senses are interacting with the space.

Extend your awareness and your senses outwards. Examine the area around you closely – really try to take in the details of everything your senses are telling you. Focus your attention on anything that catches your interest.

Every time you feel you have discovered all there is to see, hear or feel tell yourself to go further, focus even deeper on the tiniest of details. The sound of the wind in the trees or grass, the pattern of ripples in a pond, the structure of a twig, a flower or a feather. Look for the little details that would ordinarily pass you by.

As you sit or stand quietly take notice also of how the natural world is reacting to you. There's a little bit of magic involved here... after a while you will probably find that you are becoming invisible to the wildlife that shares the space with you.

When a human arrives in an area most wildlife will react by becoming wary – or even hiding completely – but sitting still for a few minutes is often enough for them to overcome this fear and return to their normal behaviour. This is a great way to increase your chances of some magical wildlife experiences.

Stay in your special place for as long as you like – but at least for a few minutes. Afterwards think about how it made you feel. Did you feel more connected with the world around you? Do you think you saw more detail than you normally would?

THE NEW BOARDWALK AT ST MAURICE'S POND

St Maurice's Pond is a great site and, as part of our Cumbernauld Living Landscape work, we installed a new boardwalk here to help make it more accessible and safer for everyone.

Local feedback on the previous boardwalk was that the 'zig zag' shape could make walking across it quite awkward. We even had reports of dogs accidentally running off the end of the 'zags' into the water! After a local consultation, we worked with North Lanarkshire Council to produce a design that would make crossing the pond much easier and safer. The new design has more of a 'wiggle' rather than the stark awkward turns of the previous one. It also has good grip on the boards to help stop people from slipping, as well as passing places which double as dipping platforms.

Paths to and around the pond were also upgraded to reduce flooding and make the surface more accessible for people who have problems with mobility. Funding provided by the Campsies Centre (Cumbernauld) Ltd, and the National Lottery Heritage Fund enabled the new boardwalk to be installed in December 2019.

St Maurice's Pond is a great site to use as an education resource because it is right beside St Maurices High School. We've had great feedback from teachers and young people on the new design. We can't wait to work with them through our Natural Connections programme again, where pupils can learn about the different species that can be found in and around the pond and make use of the new platforms.

We can also deliver CDP to teachers who want to learn about incorporating the natural environment into their everyday lessons. St Maurice's Pond is a great site to deliver sessions because of the range of habitats that can be found there – wetland, meadow, orchard, and woodland!



Cumbernauld Living Landscape is a partnership between the Scottish Wildlife Trust, North Lanarkshire Council, Sanctuary Scotland, the James Hutton Institute and TCV – The Conservation Volunteers.

cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk

5-7 Napier Way, Wardpark North,
Cumbernauld, G68 0EH

E cumbernauldl@scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk

f CumbernauldLivingLandscape

t @WildCumbernauld

Partners



Funders



Cumbernauld Living Landscape is led by the Scottish Wildlife Trust, a Scottish registered charity (charity no. SC005792) and a company limited by guarantee and registered in Scotland (registered no. SC040247). Wild Ways Well is provided by TCV, registered as a charity in Scotland (SC039302).