

Camley Street Nature Park: Wilderness in the heart of London

ITM London

London is a city of contrasts: the remains of Roman temples rub shoulders with ultra modern, glass fronted buildings such as the 309.6 meter Shard of Glass. It is a city where anything is possible – even a thriving marshland a few minutes walk from Kings Cross Station.



The Camley Street Nature Park is a wild life reserve in miniature with plants, fish birds, walkways, an information centre, a cafe, lectures, local rangers, mosquitos etc. It is

another world which has brought nature to the heart of London. The city and the reserve live side of side in a happy symbiosis. Until the 17th century the area was



Pond



Walkway

in Middlesex Woodlands. In the 18th century it came under industrial use, and the Regents Canal was built along the eastern edge of the former country estate. In the 19th century the area was used as a coal siding, first for the canal and then for the Midland Railway. The site became derelict by the 1970s. In 1984 Camden Borough Council assigned the nascent London Wildlife Trust to manage the site and a two acre park was created from the old coal yard.

It is now a hub for London Wildlife

Trust volunteers. There is a full time education programme for Camden schools, but these and other groups must book (Camden schools have priority over booking). Individuals are welcome to drop in during opening hours or call for details of holiday play activities. The reserve has a visitor centre and provides a natural habitat for birds, butterflies, amphibians and a rich variety of plant life.

An ornate gate on Camley Street welcomes visitors to the park: a narrow strip of land on Regent's



Local horticulture



Visitors centre and play area



Vegetable growing on the canal

Ornate gate welcoming visitors



Wildlife in a natural environment



Canal. A variety of habitats co-exist in the park's environs including wetland, meadow and woodland. The park is also home to at least six species of birds and over 300 plants have been found at the site; highlights include common broomrape, hairy buttercup and the common spotted orchid.

The site is divided into the following habitats:

- A summer-flowering meadow,
- A pond with varying water level, dependent on the canal water level,
- Marshland with reed bed,

- Coppiced woodland,
- Deciduous woodland,
- Mixed woodland with scrub,
- Mixed woodland with hedgerow,
- Dipping pond (with boardwalk),
- Rainwater ponds.

Meadow herbs include white clover and poppy. Woodland trees include hazel, rowan, hawthorn and silver birch. Hazel and willow are coppiced regularly. Woodland herbs include lesser celandine and wild violet.

Marshland herbs include marsh marigold, greater pond sedge, pendulous sedge, reed, bogbean, mallow and yellow iris. Marsh-

nesting birds include reed bunting, moorhen, coot and reed warbler. According to the Mayor, London's Biodiversity Strategy and "Camley Street Natural Park, in particular, has demonstrated that a valuable wildlife space can be created from nothing to become a hub of communal and educational activity, supporting wildlife such as the reed warbler in a place where this would otherwise be unthinkable. Visitors from far and wide come to learn from this example. Time Out described the park as London Wildlife Trust's Flagship Reserve, it hosts pond-dipping

and nature-watching sessions for children and its wood-cabin visitor centre is used by the Wildlife Watch Club

The London Wildlife Trust which runs the park is the only charity dedicated solely to protecting the capital's wildlife and wild spaces engaging London's diverse communities through access to nature reserves, campaigning, volunteering and outdoor learning. In 2008, King's Cross Central started to plan a major development to the east and south of the park, with a footbridge across the Regent's Canal into the park



Park along the canal