

Bathwick to Batheaston

Take a walk with BathNats

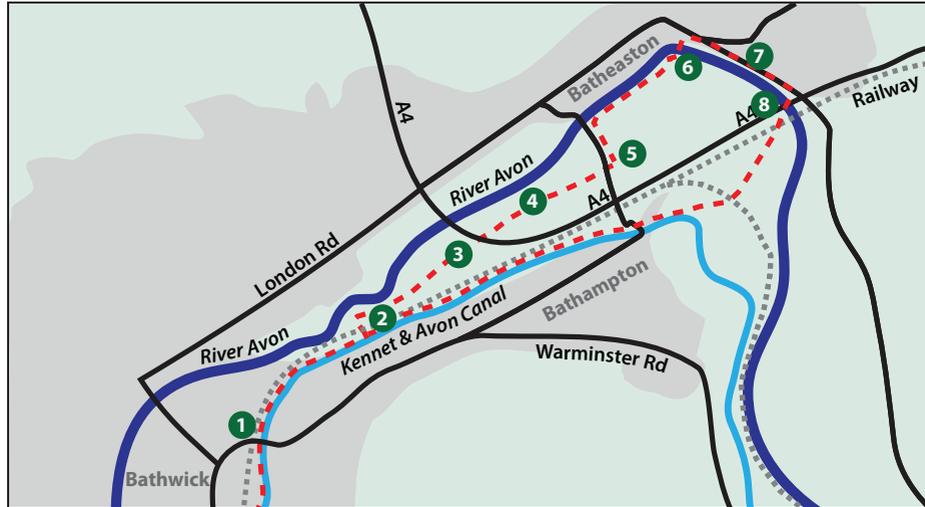
Bath Natural History Society guide to nature around the city



Beckford Road, Bathwick, to Batheaston via canal towpath and fields, with optional variation
compiled by Lucy Starling [Recommended OS Map Explorer 155 Bristol & Bath](http://www.bathnats.org.uk)

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This is essentially an easy walk on gravel, tarmac and grass over level ground which is worth doing in any month of the year, best explored between April and end of August.

No. 1 Canal towpath at Beckford Road (A36); bus stops nearby close to Forester Road. Proceed east along the towpath of the Kennet and Avon Canal where you may come across a **Moorhen** or two, perhaps a **Mute Swan** and take the gently sloping path to the left that leads to Grosvenor Bridge. From March, you should hear Blackcaps singing, invariably **Blackbird**, **Robin**, **Wren**, **Dunnock** and perhaps **Chaffinch**, **Bullfinch**, **Song Thrush** in this area plus the ubiquitous **Great** and **Blue Tit**.

No. 2 Do not cross the river but take path to your right, through the metal gate into a large field with the River Avon on your left and railway embankment on your right. Wander down to the riverbank and look and listen out for **Kingfisher**; I had a lot of activity and noise along the bank below opposite Grosvenor flats in April. There are usually **Moorhen** and **Mallards** around too. This is a popular dog walking area so need I say it, look where you are putting your feet! The footpath actually heads in a straight line directly adjacent to the railway embankment and you will come to a dense bramble patch where there is a small stream on your left. From here, I suggest you head diagonally left towards a long, fairly narrow wet ditch, full of

bramble and sedge that runs in parallel to the river. Here, on 10 April, and well into May, has been a male **Sedge Warbler**. I have had this species drop in for a day or two on migration at different sites along the Avon in past years. The bird was clearly establishing territory by vigorous song-flights. I am truly thrilled by this encounter, every day the bird is still present, perhaps with a mate but so far not yet clearly seen by me.

In this area, with mature trees and hawthorn hedgerows, in April and May, look and listen out for **Chiffchaff**, **Blackcap**, **Common Whitethroat**, **Greenfinch**, **Green** and **Great Spotted Woodpecker**, **Song Thrush** and **Mistle Thrush**. Overhead, you may see **Grey Heron**, **Raven**, **Buzzard**, **Kestrel**, **Sparrowhawk**, **Red Kite**, or one of our resident **Peregrine** pair or one of their past offspring. In winter months, and if we have had a very cold spell, look out for wildfowl, possibly **Tufted Duck**, **Little Grebe**, **Water Rail** or even **Goosander**.

No. 3 Proceed under the A4 by-pass with New Leaf self-catering cottages on your right, heading for a metal gate in the hedgerow that meets the farm tarmac track. Alternatively, follow the riverbank. You will come across lots of **Cuckoo Flower** in the damp patches on this walk, **Red Campion** and **Garlic Mustard** and on a warm April day, you should see many **Orange Tip** and also **Comma**, **Peacock**, **Small Tortoiseshell**, **Brimstone** and **Green Veined** and **Small White** butterflies.

No. 4. There are good thick hawthorn

hedges in this area and you should find at least one **Common Whitethroat** and perhaps, if you are lucky and listen carefully, a **Lesser Whitethroat**. Proceed along the tarmac track to the metal gate that meets Mill Lane. Bathampton Manor Residential Home is on your left. Linger awhile and admire the apple blossom in the small orchard and the variety of trees here and listen and watch out for **Song Thrush** and **Mistle Thrush**. By the Manor is a small **Rookery** and this provides some entertainment for the birder in March when adults are repairing old nests, with some canny pilfering going on too! I love the sound of a Rookery in Spring.

No 5. Cross Mill Lane and go through the gate of the shared cycle/footpath that ends in Batheaston car park by the river. The fields on your right adjoin the edge of the Bathampton Meadows Avon Wildlife Trust (AWT) reserve. The path takes you of course very close to the river and the Tollbridge. Rest awhile and explore around the Tollbridge; look and listen out for **Sand Martin** (May onwards) **Kingfisher**, **Grey Wagtail** (**Dipper** is a rare sighting for me here) and in season, damselflies and dragonflies. The most notable species I see here most years, in early/middle June is **Scarce Chaser**. If you are walking the path, or cycling, in late May through to middle of July, there should be plenty of **Swifts** and **House Martins** around. The latter species will of course remain far longer, into September.

No. 6. Batheaston Walled Garden is worth

a stop, if only for a snack from your rucksack. Best sighting here a few years ago, **Long-tailed Tits** building their nest in a prickly bush in early March.

No.7. Exit the car park and turn right and stop when you just past the car sales room. Here, you can look across the river to the edge of the AWT reserve. In March, I noted a single Grey Heron's nest low down in a willow; the adults were clearly feeding a youngster. And, below them, I saw a pair of **Teal**, along with Cormorant and the ever-present **Canada Goose**. In April, I was amazed to see a male **Mandarin Duck** flying low over the river, heading off in the direction of Box. Best sighting here was on 26 December, about 11am, some 10 or more years ago, a large male dog Otter! The reserve does attract wetland species such as **Reed Warbler, Sedge Warbler and Reed Bunting** and perhaps **Common Snipe** (winter).

At this point, you could retrace your steps back to the Tollbridge and possibly cross the bridge and take the footpath off to the left that leads back to Grosvenor on the other side of the river, which means a short walk along the London Road.

No. 8 Alternatively, you could continue away from Batheaston and follow the

footpath underneath the end of the bypass towards Bathford and take the sloping footpath path off to your right that runs immediately adjacent to the railway line and over the river before dropping down to cross an open field through Bathampton Farm. There are fine views to your left of Bathford Church and in the distance ahead, of the Limpley Stoke Valley and above it the woods of Bathampton.

Before you cross the railway line, taking great care, turn left along the relatively new tarmac access road that bends to the right, under a railway arch, heading up to the new housing development of Charlcombe Homes (Tynning Road). There is an extensive rabbit warren and lots of nettles and hawthorn trees and on 6 May, I was delighted to find a number of Common Whitethroat with at least two singing males. I also saw two Swallows and a few House Martins and a Song Thrush, with food in its bill; no doubt a nest nearby. Having finally crossed the railway line, it is just a short walk to the George PH by the canal and you can choose your route back into the city, if that is where you came from, either along the towpath or back across the fields alongside the Rive Avon.

Lucy Starling