

Amwell Nature Reserve

Text and Map by Alan Reynolds

Photograph courtesy of HMWT

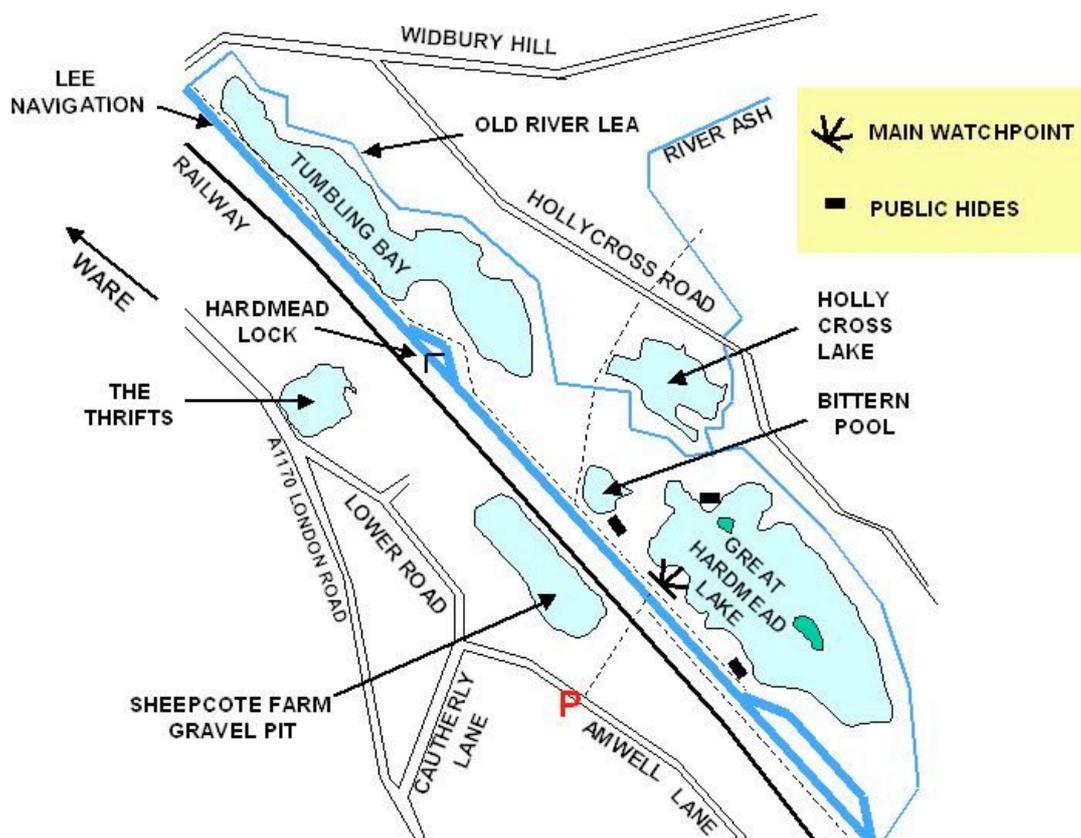


Amwell Nature Reserve is a complex of lakes, reedbeds, grassland, scrub and woodland in the Lee Valley, located south of Ware. The lakes were created by sand and gravel extraction between 1973 and 1990 by St Albans Sand and Gravel, which then became RMC Aggregates, which in turn was taken over by Cemex. Cemex continued ownership until December 2006 when it was bought by Herts and Middx Wildlife Trust, which will ensure that its status as one of the best birding sites in Hertfordshire will be safeguarded for the future.

Although the area contains 6 lakes, only Great Hardmead Lake, Hollycross Lake, the Bittern Pool and the south end of Tumbling Bay are part of Amwell Nature Reserve (see map below). The reserve is well served by tracks, viewpoints and hides which provide views over all the lakes, but access to shorelines is restricted to minimise disturbance.

Park in Amwell Lane at TL374125. Walk up the track signposted Footpath No 17 and Amwell Nature Reserve, over the railway and the Lee Navigation and you will arrive at the Main Watch Point, which offers panoramic views over Great Hardmead Lake.

During the winter months it is possible to enjoy good views of usually 1-2 wintering Bitterns, as well as Smew, Water Rail, Snipe and a large variety of waterfowl. At dusk a number of Little Egrets fly in to roost on one of the two islands. The Bittern is most commonly seen due north of the watch point, along the reeds in the northwest corner of Great Hardmead Lake.



In the spring and autumn, depending on the water levels, the site can attract a good selection of waders particularly Redshank, Ringed Plover, Little Ringed Plover, Green Sandpiper and Common Sandpiper but also occasional Dunlin, Greenshank and Wood Sandpiper.

During the summer months, apart from breeding water birds, the reserve and surrounding area supports nine breeding species of warbler.

Birds of prey are well represented with resident Kestrel, Sparrowhawk, Buzzard, and up to ten Hobbys during the summer months, with occasional views of over-flying Osprey, Red Kite and Marsh Harrier.

There is a track along the Lee Navigation running southeast from the watch point, which provides views over the southern island on Great Hardmead Lake from the Gladwin Hide. However, it is only possible to go as far as the boat moorings.

Walking northwest along the Lee Navigation from the watch point brings you to the James Hide on your right overlooking pools and reed beds. From here it is possible to get good views of Water Rail and possibly a Bittern flying into roost if you are lucky. There is also a feeding station next to the hide. During the winter months look out for Redpoll and Siskin in the trees around the hide and in the Alders on the other side of the river. From here it is also possible to go onto the boardwalk which takes you to the White Hide situated opposite the main watchpoint.

A little further on from the hide, just before you get to the footbridge over the Lee Navigation, there is the Bittern Pool on your right. Once again, it is possible to get good views of the Bittern as it makes its way through the reeds opposite. The explosive song of Cetti's Warblers is often heard from here.

From here there are two options. The first is to turn right up the track, which is the route of the old railway. This takes you over the Old River Lea and provides views over Hollycross Lake where it is possible to see Little Egrets. The bushes along the track are also a good place to see Bullfinch. There is a dragonfly trail around Hollycross Lake which is open from May-September.

Carrying straight on from the Bittern Pool along the Lee Navigation brings you to Tumbling Bay where Smew can also be seen during the winter months.

For further information about Amwell Nature Reserve, contact Herts and Middx Wildlife Trust on 01727 858901 or visit www.wildlifetrust.org.uk/herts.