

Astonbury Wood Special Sights of Spring

One of the most exciting times of the year in the woodland is spring, when there's an abundance of colour and sound! Here are some magical sights to look out for as you take a springtime stroll around Astonbury.

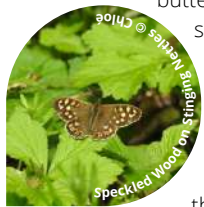
Approx. 1.5 miles circular walk (starting at The Three Horseshoes pub); terrain mostly flat.

Make the most of your walk:

- We recommend wearing appropriate clothing and footwear for the weather; bringing binoculars if you have them; bringing ID guides for wildflowers, birds and butterflies. We also have lots of Spotter Sheets you can use as you explore the woods – see www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/nature-reserves/astonbury-wood
- Please follow the Countryside Code and do not pick the flowers. Please also stick to the paths and keep dogs on leads, to protect the woodland's flora and fauna.

1 Honeysuckle grows in twists and trails, using other plants and hedges for support. The scent of its flowers is delightful, and its nectar is enjoyed by butterflies and moths.

2 The Stinging Nettle may be maligned by us, but it is of high importance to wildlife, including the caterpillars of Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock butterflies, who use them as food plants. Other butterflies,



such as the Speckled Wood, will rest on the leaves to sun themselves.

3 Spring also brings wonderful **wildflowers**. If you're visiting in late April or May, you can marvel at the swathes of Bluebell carpets among the Hornbeam trees. If you're here earlier, in March, you can admire gorgeous Wood Anemones instead. Other plants to look for include Enchanter's Nightshade, Small Teasel, Dog's Mercury and Primroses. All are indicators of ancient woodland, 37 of which have been recorded at Astonbury.



Did you know? In the past, teachers brought schoolchildren to Astonbury to study the local flora, and there was once a Field Studies Centre onsite where people could take courses in conservation and ecology.

4 In this glade, look for **butterflies** such as the Peacock and Comma appreciating the sunny area and feeding on flowers. The Midland Hawthorn is adorned with blossom in May. Other flowers you may see include Lesser Celandine, Greater Stitchwort and Lords-and-Ladies (or 'Cuckoo-pint').



Northern Entrance



5 At this time of year, the wood also comes alive with **birdsong!** Chiffchaffs arrive from southern Europe or Africa, as do Cuckoos. Helpfully, their calls mimic their names, so listen out for a high-pitched 'Chiff-Chaff!' and a lower-pitched 'Cook-oo' resounding through the trees.



Did you know? Due to the UK's warming climate, some Chiffchaffs now live here year-round instead of migrating.

6 Look out for **dragonflies** flitting over Astonbury's largest pond (also known as the Lake) and Hart's-Tongue Fern growing in the outflow channel. Wet habitats such as this are an essential water source for wildlife, and dragonfly nymphs live underwater for years.

Did you know? The Southern Hawker dragonfly, which can be seen from June to October, hunts its prey along woodland rides and above water. It is an inquisitive insect, so it may fly over to look at you!



7 **Birds** are busy nest-building and rearing their young in spring. Keep your eyes peeled for Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Coal Tits and many more flitting between the leaves and popping in and out of holes in trees.

8 Enjoy listening to the trickling water of **Stevenage Brook**, on the south-western border of Astonbury.

