Orwell Country Park was officially opened to the public in 1995. Since then it has continued to grow in size and facilities. Orwell Country Park now consists of approx. 80 hectares (200 acres) and provides a variety of walks, car parks and information. There are a number of wildlife and landscape designations which cover various areas of the Country Park, underpinning the importance of the Country Park. These include County Wildlife Sites, Ancient Woodlands, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and some of the Park is within the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

We hope you enjoy your visit to Orwell Country Park. Please remember to keep to the paths, ensure dogs are under close control, and respect all other users and wildlife.

Bridge Wood

The woodland is designated an ancient woodland. This means the land has been managed continuously as woodland since at least 1600AD. Currently the woodland is predominantly made up of sycamore, coniscan pine, and scots pine and there are also areas of broad-leaved trees.

Bridge Wood also contains a number of large English oaks, some of which are more than 400 years old. Many of these trees are pollards. Pollarding is a traditional type of tree management where by timber is cut and removed from the tree at head height. The tree can then regrow at this height without being grazed by cattle or deer. Within the wood you will also find areas of hazel / elm and sycamore coppice. These are managed for timber by cutting them near to the ground and allowing new shoots to regrow from the stump. Both coppicing and pollarding provide rare habitats, which support an abundance of wildlife.

In the spring, before the trees have fully developed leaves, the ground is covered with bluebells, wood anemone and moschatel. Later in the summer the foxgloves take advantage of the dappled shade provided by the trees and add a burst of colour under the trees. The wood is also home to a wide variety of birds and animals. On quiet mornings foxes and roe deer are often seen throughout the park. Green woodpeckers, nuthatches and nightingales are also frequent visitors.

Pipers Vale

Pipers Vale has been enjoyed by the people of Ipswich for hundreds of years and was purchased by the Borough Council in 1926. It is known locally as “The Lairs”, a dialect word meaning a piece of rough recreational land. The area is a remnant of the coastal Sandlings heath that once stretched from Ipswich to Lowestoft. Pipers Vale is particularly interesting because of it’s variety of habitats including heath, scrub, reedbeds and alder carr. This variety of habitats allows a number of uncommon plants to be found in a small area. These include sulphur cinquefoil, herblock water-dropwort and meadow-rue. These habitats also support a wide variety of birds. More than 100 species of birds have been seen in this area including redwing, whimbrel and bullfinch. Management work is undertaken to maintain the variety of habitats and prevent the area becoming wooded and overgrown.
Estuary

The River Orwell has always been of vital importance to both the people of Ipswich and the wildlife of the East Coast. The estuary is of international importance for wildlife, particularly for the birds that feed on the mudflats at low tide. These include wigeon, shelduck, oystercatcher and dunlin. In centuries past, merchants unloading shipping used the eastern bank and there were also a number of shipyards located in this area. It is thought that Bridge Wood could have got its name from an old Roman crossing point known as a bridge. This path was made up of shale and stone and allowed people to cross the river at low tide. A band of shale can still be seen today at low tide near the present Orwell Bridge. The current bridge was opened in 1982 and is 1286 metres long and more than 41 metres in height from the river.

Pond Hall Farm

Pond Hall Farm is a Grade II listed building which lies between Bridge Wood and Pipers Vale. In the Middle Ages it was part of the Manor de Alnesbourne et ponds, held by the Prior of the nearby Alnesbourne Priory. It has been suggested that here ponds does not mean a small pool, but comes from the Latin pons or bridge. As it is a busy working farm, please keep to the footpaths around the farm and ensure dogs are firmly on a lead.

Braziers Wood

Braziers Wood consists largely of a central valley with a small spring fed brook. There are a wide variety of habitats to be found in and immediately around this small valley. On the steeper slopes there are areas of ancient woodland made up of mature oak and silver birch trees. In the valley bottom unimproved grassland grades into wet marsh and alder carr woodland. These wet areas are dominated in spring by opposite-leaved golden saxifrage, moschatel and marsh marigolds.

Orwell Country Park

Orwell Country Park is owned and managed by Ipswich Borough Council. Day to day management is undertaken by the Ranger Service. The management of Orwell Country Park is governed by three overriding aims:

- To preserve and enhance the nature conservation value of the park
- To promote appropriate recreational use of the park
- To provide an educational resource

In addition to these three main aims woodland areas are managed to provide a sustainable timber product while maximising the opportunities for wildlife.

Practical management work is carried out throughout the year by Ipswich Borough Council’s Ranger Service. Work is increasingly supported by grants and sponsorship from various organisations and local businesses. Volunteers play a very important role in the management of the park, helping with much of the large practical work, and a group of interested local people called the Friends of Orwell Country Park are constantly caring for the park.

If you would like to find out more about the Country Park or get involved in practical work please contact the Ranger Service on the address below.

Orwell Country Park
Ipswich Borough Council
Ranger Service
The Stable Block
Holywells Park
Cliff Lane, Ipswich
Suffolk IP3 0PG

Tel: (01473) 433993
Fax: (01473) 433991
email: country.park@ipswich.gov.uk
We hope you enjoy your visit to Orwell Country Park but please have respect for wildlife and other people using it.

- Please keep your dog under close control at all times and do not allow it to disturb wildlife.
- Please use the poop scoop bins provided.
- Please keep to the paths to avoid damaging plants or disturbing wildlife.
- No cycling is permitted in any part of the Country Park.
- Please take your litter home. No one else wants to see it and it could kill small animals and plants.
- Never light fires or camp in the country park, it can be very dangerous.
- It is an offence to pick flowers or disturb wildlife in the Country Park. Please protect what is here and leave it for others to see.