

Warrener's Walk

(approx 3 km)

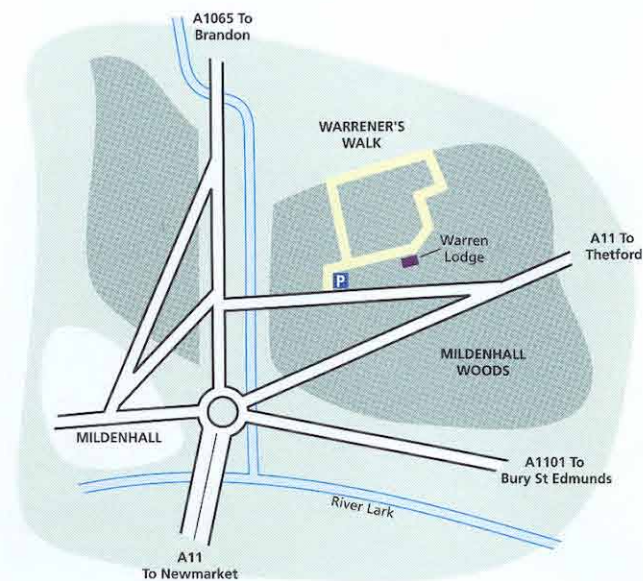
This is an easy and enjoyable walk that will help you discover some of the rare wildlife that lives in the forest and learn about the importance of the warrening industry from the Middle Ages to the 20th century. The walk is clearly waymarked and there are interpretation panels along the route.

Rabbits were introduced to this country by the Normans in the 12th century and became valued for their meat and fur. Rabbit breeding became an important industry and this area, known as the Brecks, had the largest concentration of warrens. A warrener had one of the highest paid jobs on the estate, which showed just how much people valued the skilled management of the warrens.

Sadly, the rabbit population suffered a dramatic decline in the 1950s due to the disease Myxomatosis, which made the rabbits deaf and blind and so they were unable to protect themselves from predators. As the number of rabbits were drastically reduced, the open heathland began to give way to pine and birch scrub.

Today conservationists once again value rabbits for the vital role they play in helping to maintain the short turf and disturbed ground that is needed by other specialised Brecks wildlife.

How to find us



More Information

If you would like to know more about the warrens of the Brecks, visit Mildenhall Museum and Brandon Heritage Centre.

For more detailed information on the history of warrening you may also like to pick up a copy of the Brecks leaflet titled 'Warrening: The Story Of The Rabbit In The Brecks' from the Tourist Information Centre (01638 667200).

The Working Forest

Please remember that Thetford is a working forest. Access within the forest may be restricted at certain times for operational reasons or for specialist events. For your safety, please respect all warning signs and avoid forest machinery. Thank you.



Forest Heath District Council believes the information in this leaflet was correct at the time of going to press

Countryside activities in Forest Heath

Warrener's Walk



A breath of fresh air...

- 1 Start in the car park Following the green waymarking posts, carry on through the deciduous woodland beside the roadside until you arrive at the new pine plantation.

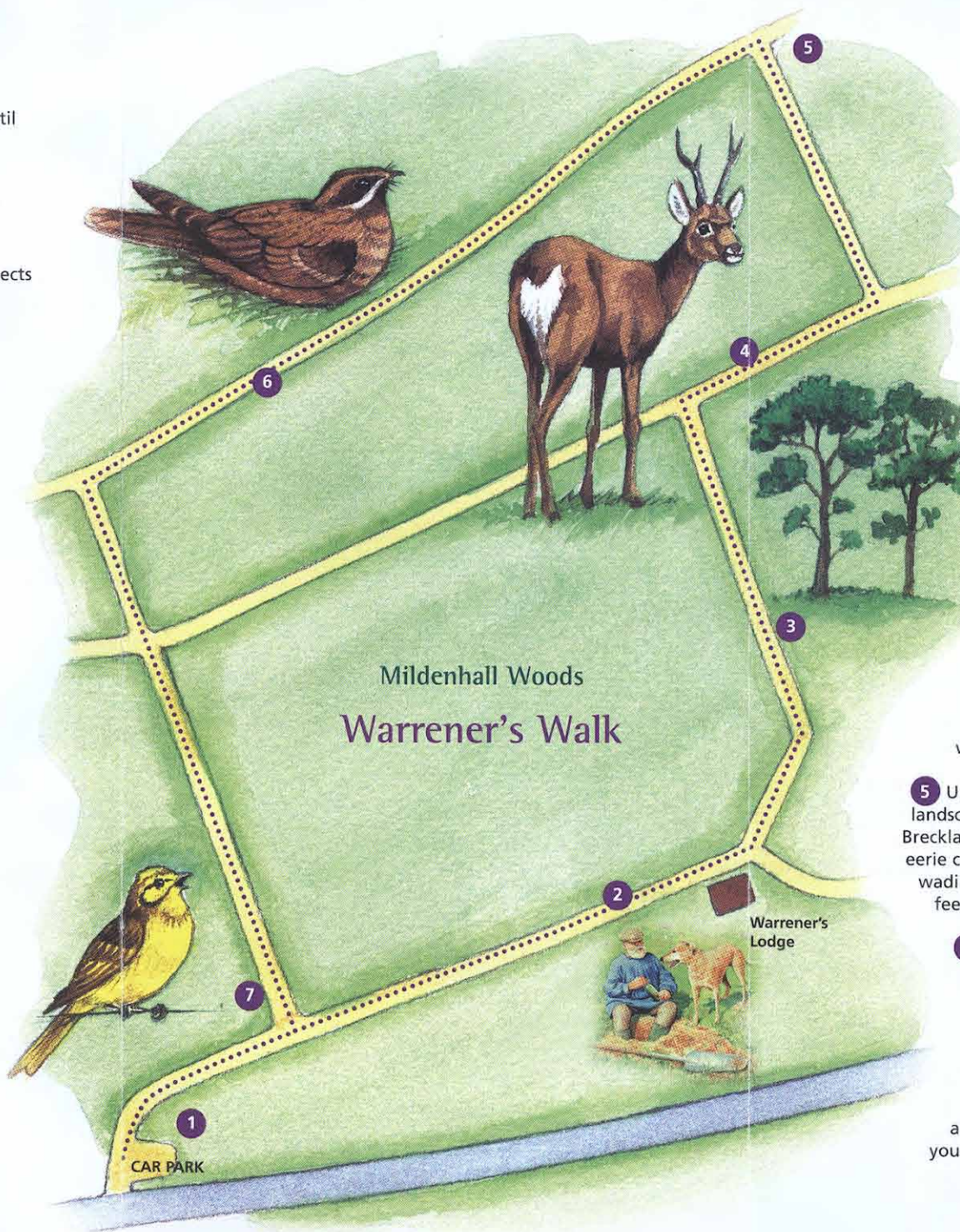
After clearfelling a particular area, it is replanted with new trees. During the first few years as the young pines become established, grasses and other specialist Brecks flora are allowed to flourish and these in turn attract insects and birds.

These clearfell areas have become nationally important for two species of scarce bird: the Woodlark and the Nightjar. Woodlarks are best seen in the spring when they deliver their beautiful, somewhat mournful song from the top of a song post or whilst hovering in a circular song flight. The Nightjar is a nocturnal summer migrant, which arrives in May to feed on moths and other insects.

During the day these birds rest on the ground relying on their superb camouflage to avoid detection. The best time to see them is at dusk on warm, still summer evenings – listen for their bizarre ‘churring’ song and wing clapping as the male tries to attract the attention of a mate. After about five years these areas become unsuitable for these birds, which move on to other nearby clearfelled areas. By carefully planning their operations, Forest Enterprise has managed to dramatically increase the populations of these rare birds.

- 2 Proceed up the hill towards the Warrener's Lodge. Just before you reach it, pause at the 'Site of Special Scientific Interest' on your right.

It was here in the 1980s that archaeologists from the British Museum found the earliest evidence of human activity in the whole of Britain. Palaeolithic man had left a pile of flint flake waste on the bank of a river, which flowed east from the Midlands. Now its south-facing slopes are an ideal habitat for Brecks plants.



- 3 Continue to follow the waymarker posts through the mature plantation. Listen for the high pitched calls of Goldcrest and Coal Tits which are two of the few birds able to live in these dense plantations.

The route follows the line of a Scots pine belt, which is a characteristic feature of the traditionally open Brecks landscape. These belts of twisted pines were once windbreak hedges, planted to stop the precious topsoil from blowing away.

- 4 Upon emerging from the plantation turn right and then left and walk through the young plantation.

In the summer, several pairs of Tree Pipit and Yellowhammer may be seen singing from the top of small trees or the telegraph lines overhead. In the evenings, Roe Deer may be seen grazing along the edge of the woodland rides.

- 5 Upon reaching the T-Junction, the open landscape in front is a good example of Breckland and if you are lucky you may hear the eerie calls of the rare Stone Curlew, a nocturnal wading bird which likes dry open grasslands to feed and rear its young.

- 6 Continue following the waymarkers alongside the open farmland and listen out for the familiar, although increasingly rare, Skylark as it sings overhead.

- 7 Cross over the warrener's bank and follow the track between the mature and young plantation, which will return you to your starting point.