

Nottingham Road to Tithby Road bridge

This first, wooded, section begins with an embankment that changes to a deep cutting before the Tithby Road Bridge.

Near the Nottingham Road entrance, an open upward slope immediately gives way to dense blackthorn that covers, and almost hides, the old station platforms. The white flowers, which appear before the leaves, are amongst the earliest to be seen in spring and by August and September the bushes yield an abundance of sloes. Some people enjoy the raw, bitter taste, whilst others may use the fruit to make sloe gin. Blackthorn along with hawthorn and, to a lesser extent, dog rose may be encountered throughout the length of the park.

A high arching avenue of sycamore follows and, as the avenue opens out, on the right there is an ash tree and several guelder rose shrubs. Guelder rose is much used in roadside landscaping, and has creamy white flowers in May and clusters of almost glowing, red berries in August and September when the green of the leaves is replaced by red and then rich purple.

A silver birch tree on the left and a wych elm on the right precede a small clearing containing the once rare rose bay willow herb, which is being crowded out. There is also field maple on the left and wych elm just before the Tithby Road Bridge. Many of the trees along this first stretch were planted some years ago, but the wych elm has taken hold probably from the adjacent spinney. In spring, the fruit is most clearly seen from the top of the bridge.

Honesty and forget-me-not flowers occur in the more open parts.

Because there are houses along either side of this first section of the park many garden birds may be seen, including the robin, blackbird, and small flocks of the less common long-tailed tits. Tawny owls are more often seen than heard. Theirs is the familiar t'wit t'woo call, the first syllable given by a female, with a male answering with the second part. Song thrushes, the rather less common mistle thrush and bullfinches can be heard in the trees. Throughout the spring and summer common residents of the wooded sections are the speckled wood, holly blue and orange tip butterflies.

Tithby Road bridge to the A52 bypass tunnel

The cutting between these bridges progressively becomes less steep. It continues to be wooded, but less heavily and there are remnants of the original grassland to be seen on the left hand side.

Initially, there is much wych elm as well as ash and sycamore. Grassland may be seen through the trees along the left edge of the old track bed.

A large whitebeam tree is half way along on the right, with a number of hazel bushes on the left. The thorn scrub becomes dense on either side, and this has almost eliminated the cowslips, which once were common along here. However, woodland species including wood avens, bluebells, dog violets and sweet violets, many of which display the white form of flower, have become established. Rabbit burrows may be seen on the left, until a small clearing opens immediately before the A52. A small oak tree is in the clearing. Knapweed and ragwort give sustenance to summer butterflies. Sunny days throughout the spring and summer may reveal the soaring flight of the comma butterfly.

A52 tunnel to first farm bridge

Here, the cutting becomes increasingly shallow. Trees and shrubs become less dense and give way to grassland.

Beyond the A52 tunnel there is a bramble patch on the left and planted cherry trees on the right. The grassland begins to become more evident, first on the left where it is dotted with hawthorn with its beautifully scented may blossom in the spring. Some of the blossom is red indicating a form of Midland hawthorn on which the fruit, or haws, has two or three seeds instead of one. Buddleia bushes on the left of the track bed provides late summer sustenance for a number of brightly coloured butterflies including the migratory painted ladies and red admirals.

Clumps of hazel are growing on the track bed, and the grassy slope on the right is dotted with cowslips.

Years ago, local fires caused either accidentally by a passing train or deliberately by railway workers contributed to the rich mosaic of flowers amongst the grassland. As part of the current management plan a series of 'scrapes', where the surface has been removed to simulate the conditions caused by fire, has been made to give annual and biannual flowers a chance to thrive. The first of these scrapes can be seen on the left just prior to the bridge. Rare brown argus and small copper butterflies have been seen on and around the scrapes, the latter in greater numbers than ever previously recorded. The food plant is sorrel, which is also now growing on the scrapes.

The rare lesser toadflax, once feared lost from the area, has colonised in spectacular fashion this and other scrapes. heralding the spring, one of the earliest flowers to be seen is coltsfoot.

In recent years, kidney vetch has been found growing on the track bed either side of the farm bridge. Common elsewhere on chalky soils, it is not known in the wild within 10 miles of Bingham.

First to second farm bridges

From the first of these two bridges, the cutting continues to become less deep, and has almost disappeared by the second. The clinker on

the track bed allows plants to survive that would be crowded out in richer soil, whilst the grassy slopes are species rich.

The unusual yellow-juiced poppy occurs immediately beyond the bridge on the left. The familiar field poppies flourish on the scrapes and elsewhere where there is soil disturbance.

The grassland, which dominates this stretch, supports good numbers of ox-eye daisies and field and common bindweed. This is the food plant of the nationally rare four-spotted moth. Other day-flying moths that may be seen occasionally include colourful five-spot burnet and the cinnabar, whose black and yellow caterpillars may be found on ragwort that occurs throughout much of the park.

Flowers that are beginning to increase in numbers on the sparse soil of the track bed include common and mouse-ear hawkweed. From this area, to the end of the site lady's bedstraw is commonly found. Various umbel flowers are to be seen including burnett saxifrage. Purple knapweed is a valuable source of nectar as well as adding colour throughout the summer.

On the right, just before the bridge, there is one of many apple trees that have become established, presumably from discarded apple cores.

Second farm bridge to pylons

The site narrows as the cutting gives way to a section on a level with the surrounding farmland, which in turn yields to the start of a long embankment.

The fern, black spleenwort, grows on the brickwork of the bridge.

Immediately after the bridge, on the right is a solid mass of blackthorn, whilst on the left there is a substantial bramble patch. This area provides cover for visiting warblers, whitethroat and lesser whitethroats. The bramble flowers provide food for brown butterflies including meadow browns, ringlets and gatekeeper. The caterpillars of these species feed on grass and may be seen along any sheltered, grassy part of the site.

The third of the scrapes has been made in this section, where common poppies are thriving. St Johns wort and the once rare but now common rose bay willow herb are in good numbers. Toadflax can be seen in flower in late summer.

The cutting ends beyond an access gate on the left. On either side there is hawthorn and dog rose. A few yards beyond the gate, on the south there is a single example of