



Landscape and Wildlife notes

This walk follows a route through quiet residential roads, but there is scope for interesting diversions along the way.

Point 2 This lane has a rural feel with a tall hawthorn hedge and verge with wild flowers such as cow parsley and stinking iris. This iris is most noticeable in the autumn and winter when its bright orange seeds are held a three-part seed case. Cow parsley is one of the first plants to show fresh new growth in the late winter; it has flat white heads of creamy white flowers in summer. Different species of this family flower over long period from spring through the summer. Ivy can also be seen in many places. It is one of the few plants that flower in late autumn so provides a good source of nectar for insects during a difficult time of year. The black berries are food for blackbirds, starlings and wood pigeons in spring, again when times are hard.



Point 3 The view of Oxford must be one of the best in the area. The towers and spires of Oxford are well known, but this is a good spot to see how the city is situated in the landscape. It originally developed at a fording place of the river, hence the name. The flat river plain is in marked contrast to the surrounding hills, both at Botley to the west and at Headington and Shotover in the east. The plain was formed by the action of the river over thousands of years, flooding the land and depositing silt. Hinksey, on the edge of the river plain, was a settlement on a drier area. The "ey" part of the name means "an island". The hills are much drier with free-draining limestone often close to the surface as on the rough track alongside the open field. Water percolates through limestone to emerge as springs where the water table meets impermeable clay. Along this ridge there are several quite steep valleys formed by this action.



The rough grassland on the hillside contrasts with the nearby gardens. Look out for another member of the cow parsley family here. This is wild carrot, which flowers later in the summer. The flower often has a small dark flower in its centre, which attracts pollinating flies in search of a mate. Unlike other cow parsleys, the seed head folds in on itself, rather than remaining umbrella shaped.



Point 4 & 5 Look out for a variety of interesting plants in the gardens which adds to the local biodiversity by providing extra nectar and food sources, as well as shelter, particularly in evergreens during the winter. Some gardens contain old fruit trees, whilst others have box, larch (England's only native conifer) and a range of exotic conifers from all over the world. Hedges can also be very varied – notice the old field hedges composed mainly of hawthorn, compared to laurel, privet and beech amongst many species to be seen. Beech retains its brown autumn leaves until the spring, thus providing some added shelter for birds and small mammals.

Across the road at Point 5 in Harcourt Hill is Raleigh Park, which can be accessed by a public footpath. This has good areas of wildlife interest so would be well worth exploring.

Point 5c The benefit of fresh clean water was recognised in the early 17th century when a Conduit House was built to collect water from nearby springs to be piped to Carfax in Oxford to provide pure water to Oxford residents. See information board.