

Rare Wildlife Found on Luxury Hotel Grounds

Colonies of rare flora and fauna are thriving in and around the grounds of a luxury broadland hotel unbeknown to most of its visitors.

Part of the 21 acres of Ivy House Country Hotel grounds – which stretch down to Oulton Broad – sits in a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSI) and borders on to Suffolk Wildlife Trust's Carlton Marshes Nature Reserve, where some of the highest protected species of birds, animals, insects and plants in the country are found.

The hotel's owners have taken down fences and cut paths wide enough for wheelchairs, bikes and buggies to open an unobstructed route for visitors to enjoy the hidden wildlife wonders.

Dr Adrian Parton, a biochemist, and his cousin Keith Parton, Ivy House's general manager, have been working closely with Suffolk Wildlife Trust since buying the hotel nearly four years ago and are investigating new ways to help visitors explore wildlife, such as guided walks.

Neighbouring Carlton Marshes Nature Reserve provides one of a few sites in the UK where the endangered Fen Raft Spider can be found.

It is now thriving in dykes across 100 acres after a successful translocation programme five years ago downstream from Redgrave and Lopham Fen, at the source of the River Waveney more than 35 miles away.

Rare species are in abundance in and around the reed beds, dykes, grassland and water in and around the grounds include:

- **Barn owls**
- **Chinese Water Deer**
- **Birds, including Grasshopper and Cetti's Warbler, Water Rail, whose call sounds like a squealing pig, marsh harrier, hobby, kingfisher and woodpecker**
- **Norfolk hawker dragonfly and Scarce Chaser are amongst a variety of 18 species of Dragonflies and damselflies**
- **Southern Marsh orchids, Bogbean, Marsh Pea, Saw Sedge.**
- **Two of the UK's rarest snails, segmentina nitidia and anisus vorticulus**
- **Water voles and otters**

Annual highlights for wildlife lovers are the Norfolk Hawker in June, southern marsh orchids, marsh marigolds and ragged robin in June and July and snipe, wigeon and teal in winter.

Helped by SWT volunteers, the Partons took down fences and gates which once blocked entry to the broadland from the hotel and cut paths to open access to and around Oulton Broad, which forms part of the Angles Way along the River Waveney.



The marshes, a mix of wet woodland, grazing marsh, dykes and fen, provides the ideal habitat for the Fen Raft Spider, which means the species is now far less endangered.

Barn owls, which fell to below 100 breeding pairs in Suffolk 11 years ago, are back to levels last seen 80 years ago because of a nest box scheme.

Dr Parton and Mr Parton meet regularly with SWT warden Matt Gooch.

“All of this wonderful wildlife is thriving and breeding on our doorstep and many have no idea so we are going to promote how much our guests can see when they wander around the grounds and along the broadland walks,” Mr Parton said.

An army of SWT volunteers worked with them to take down barbed wire fences and gates to open paths, which led Dr Parton to invest in a tractor to cut and maintain new walkways and picnic areas to overlook the water to integrate the hotel grounds into the spectacular broadland scenery.

Mr Gooch said: **“Many people have little idea of what is thriving on the reserve and in the reed beds here. The Fen Raft Spider has been a huge success story and is multiplying across about 100 acres here. People come from all over to see them.”**

The spider, which grows to the size of a hand, are monitored and surveyed where it thrives on the dyke edges. The best time to see them is in August. Its other sites are a canal in Wales and Pevensy Levels, Sussex.

“It is the best place in East Anglia to hear Grasshopper Warblers. Also, there are barn owls, which are the highest protected species in the country. When the Crooked Barn was converted, it was stipulated that, because it had barn owls, there had to be an owl box. Barn owls like the rough grassland here. Suffolk Wildlife Trust put in triangle boxes and provided a nesting habitat. In East Anglia, we have a quarter of the world’s population of Chinese Water Deer, which like damp land and seek it out. The deer, which roar like lions, escaped from zoos and parks across the country and settled in the habitat of Carlton Marshes, which has the ideal conditions.”

“I walked from our car and looped back round to the river the other day and saw 38 Chinese Water Deer.”

Mr Gooch said complaints about the footpaths had dropped since the Partons took gates out to provide an unobstructed route from Nicholas Everitt Park to Carlton Marshes car park, a walk of about two miles.

Mr Parton widened the path for access for all for wheelchairs, bikes, buggies

Carlton Marshes has been a reserve since the 1970s and has expanded massively and is now part of the reserve that spreads across to the Oulton side of the river and makes up 460 acres of land around the edge of Lowestoft. Visitors can walk between Oulton Broad and Carlton Marshes and the Waveney River Centre at Beccles.

- Suffolk Wildlife Trust now has the opportunity to buy nearly 400 acres more land there, which will create their biggest nature reserve in the county. An appeal to raise £1 million pounds in two years is running to return the area to a wetland habitat.

To find out more about the wildlife at and around Ivy House, visit www.suffolkwildlifetrust.org or call the reserve team on 01502 564250. For Ivy House, visit www.ivyhousecountryhotel.co.uk or 01502 501353.