

Fontburn

Site designations

Whole reservoir is designated as a Local Wildlife Site with two company designated nature reserves.

Location

Five miles south of Rothbury on the B6342.

Access & facilities

A public footpath may be followed along both banks; the southern one linking into a longer way marked route across Greenleighton Moor (neighbouring National Trust land), whilst the north shore route finishes at the boundary of the nature reserve. Car parking, fishing lodge and toilet facilities are available at this site.

Site

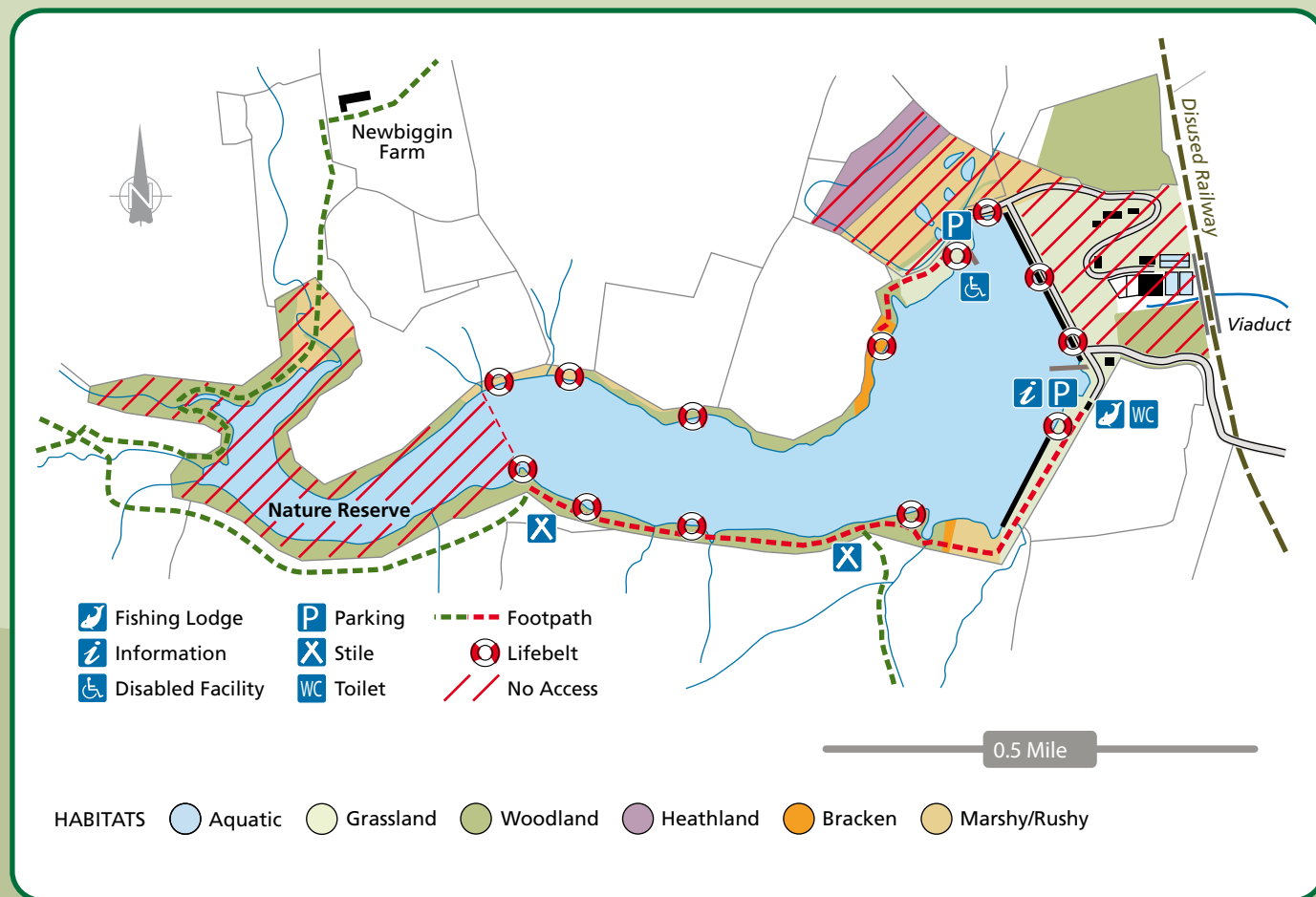
The reservoir was built in 1905 at an altitude of 180 metres. Fontburn is a very popular and successful trout fishery which is stocked with Rainbow and Blue Trout.

Habitats

The north shore is mainly vegetated with scrub and woodland. Tree species adjacent to the path include willow, blackthorn, elder, birch, hawthorn and hazel. The car park at the northern end is flanked by habitats containing a mixture of grasses and ruderal (quick growing) species including rosebay willow herb, ragwort, common knapweed and spear thistle. The low-lying ground to the east and north of the car park comprises undisturbed and species rich grassland and several interesting plants may be found here including twayblade, grass of parnassus, quaking grass and marsh fragrant orchid. Common spotted orchids also grow in the base-rich flushed area.

The west facing dam wall is colonised by ruderal plants characteristic of neutral grasslands such as ragwort, sneezewort and common knapweed to name a few.

The western end of the reservoir is managed as a nature reserve. The marshy grassland supports numerous herbs and grasses



including common knapweed, meadowsweet, lesser spearwort common valerian, purple moor grass, tufted hair grass and yorkshire fog. A few willows and alders fringe the shore. The promontory woodland trees have been coppiced in the past and comprise mainly birch with a hazel understory. Wood sage, male fern, broad buckler fern and false brome provide a major component of the field layer in the woods.

On the shore, bottle sedge and field horsetail grow in the flushed areas whilst amphibious bistort and silverweed occur on the deeper shoreline silts.

The vegetation on the south shore is a mixture of coniferous plantation and birch woodland, though some of the conifers have been removed in recent years and the ground replanted

with broadleaved species such as oak, rowan ash and birch. Where there is an under storey, it is usually rowan and hawthorn and alder forms a component of the canopy in the wetter areas.

The field layer beneath the birch canopy is primarily wavy hair grass or bracken, with a mixture of woodland herbs including wood sorrel, wood sage and self heal.

At the extreme south eastern corner of the site there is an area of marshy grassland with abundant meadow-sweet, wild angelica, common knapweed and sneezewort. Common sedge and sharp-flowered rush also occur here. Where there is periodic flooding of the shore, species include common spike rush, reed canary grass, lesser spearwort and amphibious bistort.



Firecrest have also been recorded. Members of the Tyneside Ringing Group have erected bird and bat boxes and young birds are ringed before they fledge so that their individual progress may be monitored and population data collected.



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Birds

The main body of Fontburn reservoir is a poor site for birds because of its intense use by anglers. It is also subject to severe draw down during the summer, which frequently leaves the nature reserve with no standing water.

A small flock of mallard and up to eight goosander have been recorded in the winter, whilst flocks of greylag geese are often present in the spring and autumn. Black-headed and common gulls roost on Fontburn in the autumn. Osprey may occasionally be seen on passage to and from their summer breeding grounds, and in September 1991 a red-breasted goose spent several days at the site. Herons are frequent visitors to the margins of the reservoir during the summer and from May to July, mallard, teal and moorhen may be seen rearing their young in the nature reserve. Water rail are also known to breed at Fontburn.

During the summer, the deciduous woodlands around Fontburn are home to a variety of breeding birds including pied flycatcher, blue tit, chaffinch, coal tit, garden warbler, willow warbler, goldfinch, great tit, greenfinch, marsh tit, redpoll and redstart.

Other wildlife

Fontburn is home to four British reptiles: common lizard, adder, slow worm and grass snake. British populations of reptiles and amphibians have declined in recent years, resulting in increased protection for them under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and Countryside and Rights of Way (Crow) Act 2000.

Fontburn has a typical reptile population for this part of Northumberland but of particular interest is the presence of grass snakes; for Fontburn has one of the most northerly authenticated colonies of this species in Britain. The site is also good for amphibians with common frog and common toad breeding in the shallow margins of the reservoir. Recent surveys of the settling ponds adjacent to the north shore car park also confirmed the presence of great crested newts as well as palmate and smooth newts.

A variety of mammals inhabit the woodland around the reservoir such as badger, roe deer, brown hare, fox, weasel and red squirrel. Mink also inhabit the area and otter are known to frequent the River Font. At dusk during the summer, pipistrelle bats may be observed feeding at the edge of the woodland near Newbiggin Burn and whiskered/brandts bats may be seen feeding at the edge of the reservoir.

A few common British butterflies such as green-veined white, common blue, small tortoiseshell, meadow brown, ringlet and small heath have been recorded on the grasslands around the reservoir during the summer.



Further information

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