

Grassholme

Site designations

Within North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and part designated as Local Wildlife Site.

Location

Grassholme is situated in Lunedale, between the B6276 Middleton-in-Teesdale road and an unclassified road running from Mickleton to Kelton.

Access & facilities

This reservoir provides a venue for both angling and sailing and is a popular "day-out" destination. Northumbrian Water opened a visitor centre here in 1993 that incorporates not only toilets and a warden's office, but also a fishing lodge and information room. The latter features a 'hands-on' exhibition that gives details of the recreational opportunities in the area, and conservation initiatives.

The terraced car park offers spectacular views of the valley and a small shop provides refreshments and clothing for visitors during the summer season.

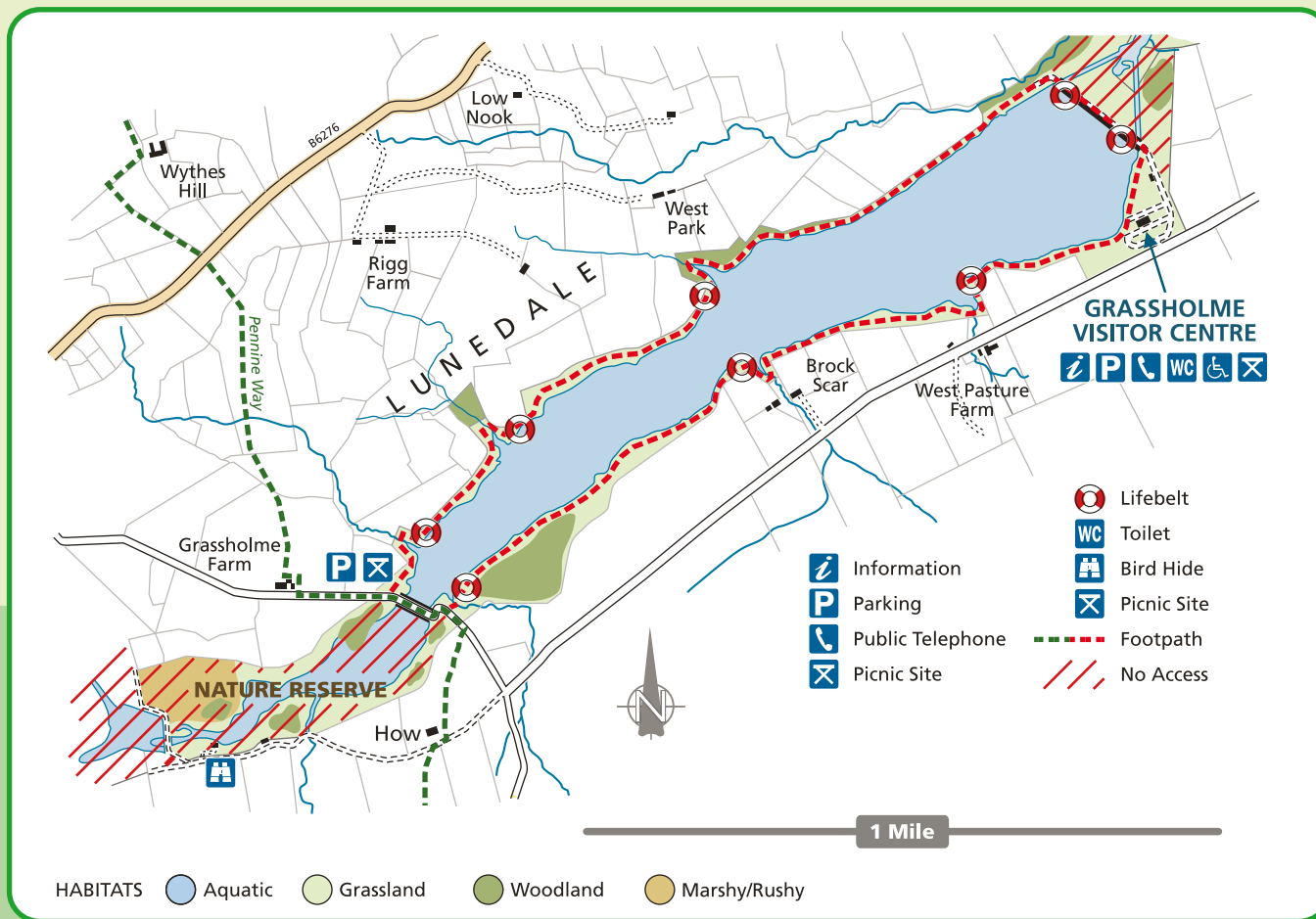
A public footpath follows the reservoir shoreline and the Pennine Way long distance footpath marks the eastern boundary.

Site

Grassholme lies below Selsset reservoir in Lunedale. This reservoir was built in 1915 at an altitude of 270 metres. A nature reserve was established here in the late 1960's, in recognition of its importance as a refuge for birds during the breeding season. In recent years, trees have been planted in an effort to diversify the habitat within the reserve. The bird hide, at the western end of the reservoir, is accessible to wheel chair users.

Habitats

The reservoir is almost completely surrounded by acid grassland that is co-dominated by sweet vernal-grass and sheep's fescue with crested dog's tail and mat-grass.



The marginal vegetation on the north western side of the nature reserve is relatively diverse. Here, deposits of mud and silt result in the reservoir having shallow margins, which are suitable for the establishment of tall emergent vegetation such as reed canary grass, meadow sweet, bottle sedge, smooth rush and common spike-rush. Other associated species include water starwort, silverweed, water mint, lesser spearwort, water forget-me-not, marsh willowherb and various small sedges such as oval sedge and carnation sedge.

Small fragments of woodland contribute to the habitat diversity of the site. Cote House Wood, for example, is dominated by ash with an under storey of hazel and has a rich ground flora that includes wood sedge, water avens, wood avens, primrose, ramsons, dog's mercury, wood-sorrel, bluebell, wood forget-me-not, hedge woundwort and wood cranesbill.



Coot, moorhen, goosander and tufted duck have been recorded breeding in the reserve, and in June 1990 a pair of great-crested grebe were recorded for the first time.

Waders such as snipe, oystercatcher, and lapwing breed on the land surrounding the reservoir whilst common sandpiper and ringed plover breed on the reservoir margins. Other birds associated with the waters' edge include pied wagtail, grey wagtail and dipper. Passage waders such as greenshank and green sandpiper may also utilise Grassholme. Birds of prey, including sparrowhawk, kestrel and short-eared owl (which breed nearby), visit the reservoir to feed. Unusually, a colony of jackdaws is known to nest in disused rabbit burrows within the nature reserve.

Other wildlife

Common toad spawn in the reservoir margins whilst within the water body itself, bullhead, brown trout, minnow, loach, eel and swan mussels have all been recorded.



Birds

Britain has a large population of gulls, primarily associated with its extensive coastline. Important concentrations of gulls occur on reservoirs, which are used primarily for roosting.

The importance of reservoirs relative to coastal and other wetland habitats in Britain is, however, difficult to define due to the mobility of gulls.

Several of our reservoirs have large gull colonies and we have established a nature reserve at Grassholme, partly in recognition of its importance black-headed gulls. There used to be 1000's of gulls roosting and breeding here but most have now moved elsewhere, although a good number still use Selset reservoir.

The number of wintering wigeon at Grassholme has increased gradually since the mid 1970s to a maximum of over 250 in recent years whilst teal have also increased in abundance with 1999 showing a peak count. Mallard show a similar trend whilst numbers of canada geese show a dramatic increase at the site from the mid 1990's.

The winter numbers of whooper swan, pochard, tufted duck, goldeneye and goosander have, however, always been low. Little grebe have been recorded several times during the late summer.

