

The Jubilee Cowerslea Nature Trail, Beer



Start:

The trail starts outside the Children's playground in Jubilee Gardens.

Follow the Coastal Path towards Seaton (eastwards).

1. Stone wall habitat

Stone walls along the path provide a habitat for lichens. Lichens often look like splashes of paint or bird droppings. Look for the bright yellow lichen, Caloplacca, which favours stonework with high nutrients (such as bird droppings!)

Follow the coastal footpath, stopping at the bottom of the steps to look out over the bay.

2. Beer Bay

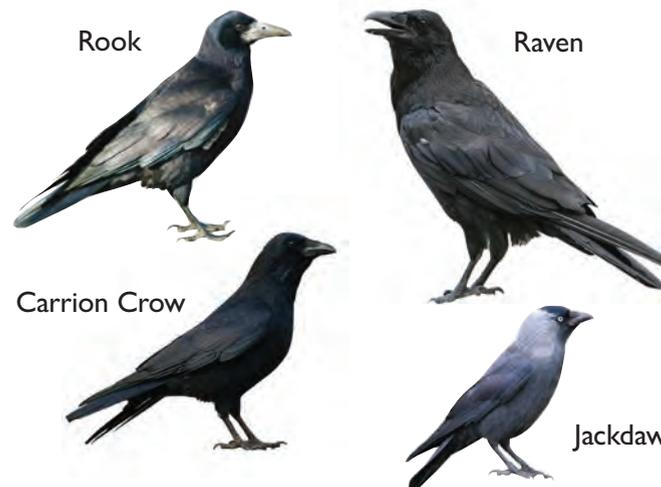
The stunning chalk cliffs form part of the Jurassic Coast World Heritage site. At lowtide the horse-shoe shape of the bay can be seen. To the west, Beer Head protects from prevailing south westerly winds; to the east King's Aisle slows long-shore drift, keeping the shingle beach in place (vital for launching the fishing boats).

Climb the steps- pausing occasionally to admire the changing view. Stop at the top.

3. Holm oaks

The Holm oak (*Quercus ilex*) is native to the Mediterranean and is very tolerant to high winds and salt-laden sea-breezes. This evergreen oak provides winter shelter for birds and invertebrates. Look on the ground for the hairy acorn cups. The mature trees support a noisy rookery. The rooks return to the same nests every year. They fly off to nearby fields during the day to hunt for worms, insects and grain.

Continue right along the tarmac path.



4. Wild Privet and Broomrape

Dense banks of Wild Privet (*Ligustrum vulgare*) grow alongside the narrow path. The leaf is more slender than cultivated Garden Privet.

Lookout for the strange flowering stems of Broomrape (June/July) along the path edges. Dead flowering stems remain well into the winter. This plant is parasitic on roots of other plants and lacks chlorophyll (green pigment). Its leaves are reduced to scales.



5. Wildflowers of chalk grassland

The alkaline, well-drained, chalky soil above the cliffs supports several interesting wildflowers associated with chalk grassland. Lookout for Nottingham Catchfly (*Silene nutans*), an uncommon plant, unfurls scented white flowers at dusk. (May/August)

Keep a look out for a clearly visible section of chalk cliff face near the path.



6. Nesting seabirds

Fulmars, Herring Gulls and Cormorants can be seen nesting on the cliff ledges in early spring. Fulmars (*Fulmaris glacialis*) are related to Albatross, gliding along the cliff face on stiff, straight, wings. Their chicks spit oily, foul-smelling gastric juices at intruders which clogs their feathers, preventing them from flying. The birds are noisy, with a throaty, cackling call.

Ravens and Jackdaws also nest along this stretch of the cliffs. The Raven's nest is hidden in a crevice, only visible from the sea. It is a massive, untidy structure- often festooned with bright orange fishing rope. The Ravens return to the same nest every year, and their young can often be seen sitting on top of tall conifers in nearby gardens. Listen for their deep 'Kronk' (or in the spring a selection of odd noises, including knocking, clucking and a resounding 'klong'). They are fantastic acrobats and can often be seen flying upside-down!.

7. Butterflies

Several species of butterflies can be spotted along the path, lookout for these:

Gatekeeper:

Favourite nectar sources include Bramble and Wild Marjoram. The male has 2 brown scent bands crossing the larger forewing.



Speckled Wood:

Feeds on honeydew high up in bushes and trees. Males defend their territory, chasing each other in an upwards spiral.



The best time to spot butterflies is between 10am and 4pm on warm, sunny, days.

Danger- unfenced cliff. Keep away from edge.

Proceed past the 'unfenced' section of the cliff edge to where there is a wide grassy verge.

8. Orchids

This patch of semi-natural chalk grassland supports two species of orchids: Pyramidal and Bee. Heavy grazing by rabbits often trims back the flowers before they have a chance to open fully. Bee orchids are short-lived plants, relying on setting seed to keep their colony going. Scratching by rabbits creates patches of bare ground which is easier for seeds to colonise.

At the end of the path turn left up the hill. (Old Beer Hill)



Bee Orchid

9. Holes and secret pathways

The steep roadside banks are home for small mammals such as Bank Voles and Wood Mice. Look for small holes in the bank, often connected by well worn paths under the undergrowth and beside tree roots. The squeaks of argumentative shrews can sometimes be heard as they hunt for insects along the bank.

At the top of the hill turn left onto the cycletrack (Cowerslea Way).

10. Young trees and Rabbits

This new section of cycle track has been planted with a selection of native trees including Bird Cherry (*Prunus avians*), Silver birch (*Betula pendulis*) and Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*). Rabbits live in burrows in the hedgerow, often causing the banks to collapse onto the path. They can be seen in large numbers at dusk, grazing in the fields nearby. They are very efficient breeders and can have up to 12 young every 30 days during the breeding season (March - October).

At the end of the cycle track turn left along the road. After a short distance turn left along the track and follow the footpath back towards Jubilee Gardens (Ashton's Path)

Follow the path down the hill back to Jubilee Gardens. Look out for the children's wildlife 'rubbing plaques' on the fence posts, and the 'pebble bugs' in the steps.



Beer Parish Council