

Getting Here

Westbrook Hay is situated on the hills to the south of the Box Moor Trust Centre on London Road, Hemel Hempstead (A4251). Westbrook Hay can be reached from the A4251 (London Road), running between Hemel Hempstead and Berkhamsted. Close to the Box Moor Trust Centre on London Road, turn into Westbrook Hay drive (signposted for the Box Moor Trust Old Barn). Follow the drive all the way to the top of the hill, then take the first track on the left (just before Westbrook Hay School entrance). This will lead you into the car park next to the Old Barn Education Centre.

Car Parking

The car park by the Old Barn is usually open during daylight hours. An alternative car park can be found at the base of the hill, at the start of Westbrook Hay drive. Park here and walk up through the meadows to the Old Barn and the starting point for this walk.

Users of Wheelchairs, Pushchairs or Mobility Scooters

The boardwalk is the main section of this walk suitable for wheelchair and pram users. The visitor will have to assess the suitability of the rest of the walk but this will depend on weather conditions as some of the ground is uneven with puddles and mud after rain. If the section between points (3) and (4) on the map seems unsuitable, please try continuing along to the end of the boardwalk, through the gate and into the large field. At the pond, bear right to a large gate leading back into the wood to re-join the walk at point (4). Please contact us for more advice on alternative routes. Benches are situated at several points around the route. A mobility scooter is available on loan from the Box Moor Trust Centre for use on this walk. Please ring in advance to arrange. Tel: 01442 253300.

Safety

When carrying out the activities suggested in this leaflet, please take great care. In particular, do not enter our pond dipping areas. It should be possible to observe the ponds from outside these areas. The Box Moor Trust cannot accept responsibility for the children under your care.

Care of the Box Moor Trust Estate

Where livestock are grazing, please keep dogs on a short lead or at heel. If your dog fouls, please bag and bin it or take it away with you. More information can be found in our leaflet 'Dogs and the Box Moor Trust'.

Please also:

- Close all gates.
- Do not leave litter or light fires.
- Do not pick plants, flowers or fungi.

Brilliant Birds

A short, easy walk for families around the woods and meadows of Westbrook Hay, including six bird-themed activities.

These activities are designed to appeal to as wide an audience as possible. Take on as many or as few as you wish or just enjoy the walk! Bring a pencil with you for one of these activities.

Look out for our bird boxes - different types of boxes suit different birds.

Most have their holes at the front as many birds fly straight into the nests. (A box with its hole turned to the tree trunk could be for hibernating dormice.)

Look for owl boxes at the edge of the wood. The owls like to perch here whilst they wait for their prey at night.

Our Old Barn has an owl loft (above the main entrance). There is also a concrete swallow box in the shelter next to the Old Barn.

If you have enjoyed this walk, why not explore further on our Orange, Blue, Green or Red walk routes? We produce seasonal 'I-Spy' inserts for children to accompany the Orange walk.

**Please visit our website:
www.boxmoortrust.org.uk**



**The
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Woodpecker Hole

Look across at the trunk of the tall sequoia tree in the field. Can you see a hole about half way up? This is the nest of a Greater Spotted Woodpecker. The babies live inside the trunk until they are old enough to fly away. These birds are famous for 'drumming' on wood to find insects to eat, to make nest holes or to impress other woodpeckers. Their beaks, necks and brain are specially adapted to stop their heads being injured. Woodpeckers also have special tongues that can extend up to 10cms beyond their beaks so they can get inside the cracks in the tree trunk to reach the insects; when they are not using their tongues, they roll them up inside their heads like a party blower!

A

Swallow Nests

Have you noticed the swallows roosting in the Old Barn? You can see them swooping in and out and you may be able to spot their cup-shaped mud nests over the entrance or in the shelter. These birds have flown thousands of miles to spend their summer here raising their young, often occupying the same nests every year. In the autumn, they will fly back to South Africa, covering up to 200 miles each day. They migrate to the Southern Hemisphere for the winter because it is much warmer and there will be many more of the insects that the swallows depend upon for their food.

B

Bird Song

Going along the boardwalk, listen out for bird song. Then, stop at the wooden fence and watch quietly through the gaps. These bird feeders are used by many different species of bird. Just as humans do, birds use their voices to communicate: their calls can warn of danger or scare off predators - very important for small birds living in dense woodland like this. Different calls even warn of whether the predator is on the ground or in the air. What bird calls can you make? Many birds also sing beautiful songs as a way of attracting a mate - the longer, louder and more complicated the song, the better the parent! Each bird species has its own special song pattern and some birds are able to mimic other songs or even sounds (including animal calls and telephones!) This is very useful for bird watching - we can tell a bird is near, even when we can't see it. Some birds only sing during the breeding season in spring and summer whilst others, like the robin, use song all year round as a way of warning other birds off their territory.

C

Nest Building

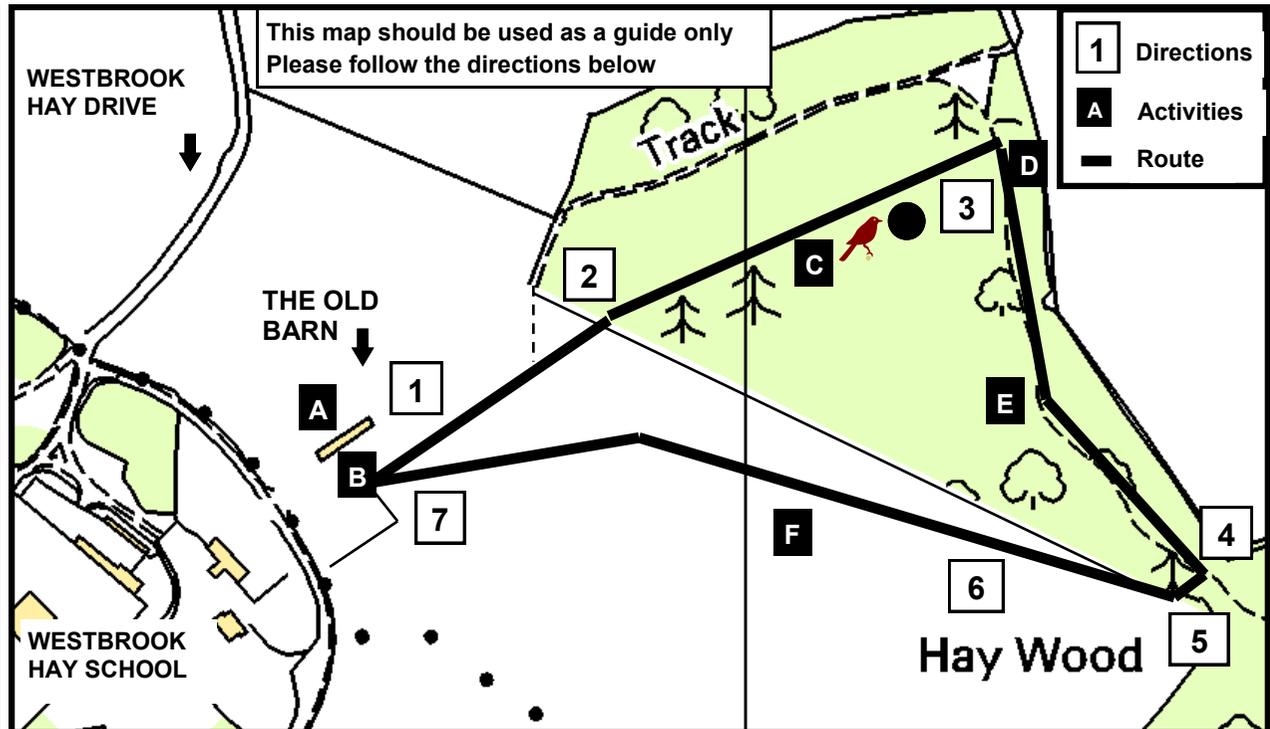
As you turn off the boardwalk, have a look at the walkers' shelter to your left with its walls and roof constructed of woven branches. This is not a skill unique to humans, however, as many birds are able to weave small twigs and grass into strong nests using only their beaks and feet. Why not find some thin twigs and grass and see if you can weave a nest? If you don't have a beak, you can always use your fingers!

D

Nuthatches

Look out for nuthatches in the trees to the right and on the bird feeders. These slate-grey birds hop up and down tree trunks; they are the only British birds that can climb down trees head-first. Nuthatches nest in holes in trees and use mud to plaster up the entrance until it is just big enough for them to get in and out. Like many birds, the nuthatch's beak is specially designed for the way it feeds. It also gives the nuthatch its name: it wedges nuts into crevices in the bark and hammers them open with its sharp, hatchet-like bill.

E



Directions

From the Old Barn (1), proceed along the boardwalk and follow it into the wood (2). Enter the wood and continue along the boardwalk as it wends its way through the trees. To the right, you will pass a bird feeding station and, a little further along, a woodland pond. Shortly afterwards, turn right onto the bridleway that crosses the boardwalk (3). *From this point on, the terrain may be subject to changing weather conditions and a flat, stable surface cannot be guaranteed. Please see the back page of this leaflet for an alternative route avoiding this bridleway.* Follow the bridleway through the woods until it crosses a second path at right angles (4). Turn right and pass through the gate into the meadow beyond (5). Bearing right, walk uphill, keeping to the edge of the wood (6). After a time, you will see the Old Barn. Go through the black metal gate into the car park (7).

Bird Orchestra

In the meadow, find a comfortable place to sit very still - then close your eyes and listen carefully for bird song. What can you hear? If you have a pencil and paper (you can use the box below), you can try to 'draw' these sounds - for example, a complicated bird song might be a twirly, up and down line and a woodpecker drill might be a long line of dots.

F