

BRANTON PONDS SITE GUIDE

GRID REF NU 049165

THE SITE

Branton Ponds are privately owned by CEMEX Ltd. The former gravel works consist of 2 ponds, separated by the main gas pipeline that have been landscaped and opened to public access as a nature conservation area.

The (older) East pond is heavily planted with trees while waterside vegetation is becoming well established, the (newer) West pond has less tree cover and is still developing although one reedbed area is well advanced. It is anticipated that in the near future livestock (ponies) will be used to help manage the west pond vegetation. The site is bounded on the north by the River Breamish which extends the habitat available to wildlife.

The species list for the site currently totals 152 and includes **Snow & Ross's Geese, Red-crested Pochard, Smew, Garganey, Black-necked Grebe, Black Stork, Great White Egret, Hen & Marsh Harrier, Hobby, Short-eared Owl, Turtle Dove & Common Redpoll.**

ACCESS

The ponds are on the edge of Branton Village, with the River Breamish forming its northern boundary. Follow the A697 and ½ mile north of Powburn turn west towards Branton, after ¾ mile a metal gate on your right leads to a carpark (GR NU049165).

It is possible to walk all the way around both ponds & along the pipeline that separates them. There is a screen by the carpark overlooking the east pond, while a path suitable for disabled access leads to a hide that looks onto the west pond. Access on foot is also possible at the corner as you enter Branton & at the north west corner nearest to Brandon ford / footbridge. Due to future management access may vary.

This is a very busy site, attracting many walkers & dogs (authors included). The paths can be very muddy & slippery in wet conditions.

CALENDAR

All Year

Species include **Mute Swan, Greylag Goose, Canada Goose, Little Grebe, Grey Heron, Mallard, Tufted Duck, Coot, Moorhen, Water Rail, Common Buzzard, Kestrel, Kingfisher, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Long-tailed Tit, Lesser Redpoll, Bullfinch, Reed Bunting, and Yellowhammer.**

Winter (Nov-Feb)

Overwintering geese & duck gradually disperse to other sites, especially in cold weather if the ponds freeze. Occasional groups of **Whooper Swan** visit, but tend to only overnight. Displaying duck species include **Mallard, Teal & Goldeneye.** Check geese flocks for **Pink Foot, Bean & White-fronted Geese.** Watch for wintering **Peregrine** stooping on flocks of duck & wader. **Curlew, Lapwing & Snipe** roost in suitable weather. **Green Sandpiper** usually winter locally as do **Woodcock.** Large feeding groups of Tits include **Long-tailed Tit** with the possibility of **Willow Tit.** **Lesser Redpoll** numbers increase as **Siskin** arrive to feed on Birch & Alder; **Yellowhammer** flock together to feed on local fields.

Spring (march-may)

The breeding season usually starts with the loud arrival of the **Black-headed Gulls** to their nest site on the east pond island. **Mute Swan, Greylag & Canada Geese & Mallard** begin nesting. **Great Crested Grebe** arrive to attempt to breed. Geese & Swans heading north may drop in, including **Barnacle Geese & Whooper Swan.** **Shelduck** take up residence and they usually nest successfully. **Osprey** travelling to their breeding grounds may be attracted in, **Tufted Duck & Coot** numbers increase during courtship. Waders returning to breed at the ponds, along the riverside or in the Cheviot Hills include **Curlew, Oystercatcher, Redshank, Common Sandpiper, Lapwing & Ringed Plover.** Occasional migrants heading elsewhere may include **Dunlin,** either **Godwit, Wood Sandpiper & Greenshank.** The **Black-headed Gull** colony also attracts in numbers of **Common & Lesser Black-backed Gull** to roost before moving on elsewhere. Hirundines appear with **Sand Martin** nesting along the river. Warblers arrive with **Chiff Chaff** favouring the riverside scrub, **Blackcap** in the tree cover, **Sedge Warbler** in various sites around the ponds and **Whitethroat** on the pipeline. **Bullfinch** become less obvious while nesting.

Summer (June-Aug)

A generally quieter period, enlivened by numerous young geese & duck, with **Tufted Duck** one of the last to appear. Wandering **Osprey** continue to appear, while local young **Common Buzzard** can be heard calling for food. Waders that have nested locally arrive to feed & roost. The gull colony can suddenly become silent once breeding has ceased. **Swift**, in decent numbers, hawk over the site with **Swallow, House & Sand Martin**. Warblers continue to add their voice with **Grasshopper Warbler** reeling in the west pond reedbed where they may be joined by **Reed Warbler** and the ubiquitous **Sedge Warbler**. Early families of **Long-tailed Tit** move through the site. **Lesser Redpoll** may also be quite obvious with numbers increasing recently.

Autumn (Sept-Oct)

Geese & duck numbers can increase dramatically as they arrive to moult, with **Greylag & Canada Geese** combined over 500, **Goosander** expected at 70+. **Tufted Duck** should be checked since **Ring-necked Duck** has been seen with them, while **Teal & Wigeon** can be numerous. **Little Grebe** can be vocal and **Great Crested Grebe** may remain until harsh weather drives them to the coast. **Kingfisher** can be viewed daily, especially if the river is high or local breeding has been successful, 2 or 3 birds is possible; they favour the willows nearest to the hide.

In summary, at any time of the year Branton Ponds is well worth a visit! *Keith Davison*