A circular walk around the ponds and streams of Bookham Commons, a Site of Special Scientific Interest and home to a wonderful variety of habitats including oak woods, plains, heathland and marshes. The ponds attract abundant wildlife such as dragonflies, newts, grass snakes, toads and frogs.Rare species such as nightingales and the purple emperor butterfly also make the Commons their home.

**Parking:** Parking is available free of charge at the National Trust Hundred Pound Bridge car park.

**Length of the walk:** approx. 1 ¼ hour walk, approx. 4km / 2 ½ miles in length.

**Start** from the National Trust Hundred Pound Bridge car park, on Bookham Road in Downside [Grid Ref: TQ 1204 5681]. From Cobham, this is found by taking Downside Road to the village of Downside. Here turn left beside St Matthew’s School into Downside Common Road and drive to the far end of this, to the corner of the common where you meet a T Junction. Here turn right, taking a single-track road - Bookham Road, for about 1 mile / 1.5kms, under a motorway and railway bridge, to the end of the road at a small National Trust car park – the Hundred Pound Bridge car park.

**The Map**

1. Take the broad rough-surfaced path with 3 posts, at the bottom of the car park, by a small National Trust Commons sign. Follow this track for about 500m (~7 minutes), and then turn right at the first fingerpost signed ‘Public Bridleway – Effingham Junction’, onto another rough surfaced track.
2. After about 200m, take the first left-hand track at a post, heading back sharply left. This path runs in front of an isolated house on the left, then over a cattle grid and small stream, and continues through a more open area to a junction of paths.
3. Turn left here on another surfaced path, and very shortly, after 50m, go through a gate across a stream. Here immediately turn right onto a grassy path that runs parallel to the stream on your right. Continue along this path for 430 m / ¼ mile, heading through an open area of tall grasses, and following the line of the stream (sometimes buried in the shrubs).

4. Ignore a pedestrian bridge on your right at a crossing of paths and continue ahead for another 170m. The path begins to curve leftwards into woodland and at a T junction of paths, turn right to shortly reach a wooden horse barrier.

5. Go a few paces right to a major crossing of tracks. [You are now close to the National Trust Tunnel car park, away on your right]. At the crossing of tracks, turn left along what is signed as a ‘No Through Road’. The railway is below you on your right, in a cutting, but is not visible, though trains may occasionally be heard.

6. Continue ahead for 300m and at a fork, go left on a path with four posts. After 200m you reach a T-junction, where you turn left, going past a sign to a National Trust Bird Hide. The Bird Hide can be visited after about 50m on the left, where it looks out onto the first of a chain of ponds. Bookham Commons was originally owned by the monks of Chertsey Abbey and several of these ponds were created by the monks to store fish.

7. From the Bird Hide, retrace steps to path, and continue left, following the broad path for another 500m / 1/3 mile, past the chain of ponds on your left. Ignore a left-hand turn with a small horse barrier on the left, but at the next crossing track, just after a small bridge marked by four posts, turn left at another horse barrier which covers only half the path. Then after a few paces go right, to skirt the pond. There are handy benches here overlooking the water, to sit and watch the wildlife.

8. Continue on ahead to a T-Junction opposite a house, Handley’s Cottage, where you turn right, on a surfaced track, for 100m, to a major junction of tracks near a National Trust map and noticeboard.

9. Here turn left, and very shortly, at a fork, go straight ahead, along the path, signposted ‘Public Bridleway – Downside’. You are now at the same junction passed on the outward part of the walk, and you now simply retrace your steps for 500m back to the Hundred Pound Bridge car park.

Feb 2019