HISTORIC ROYAL PALACES

WILDLIFE IN THE MOAT

The moat was dug during the 1270s and flooded with water to protect the Tower of London from attack. Over time, the stagnant water became a health hazard and in 1845 the moat was drained and filled in.
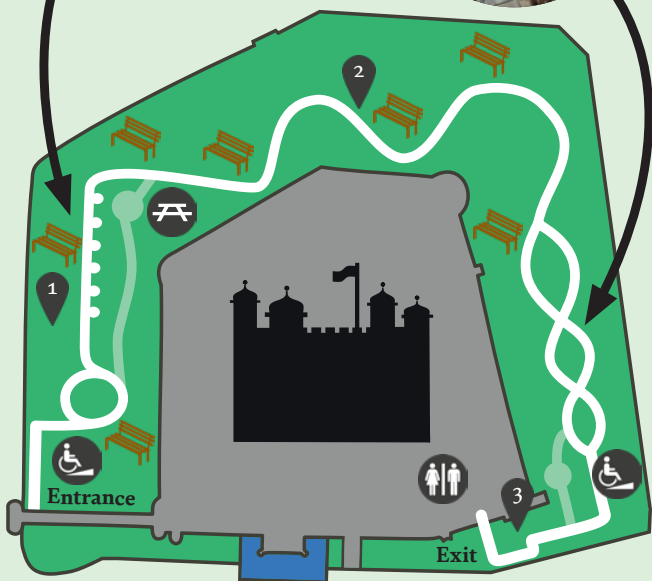
In 2022, the moat came into bloom. It was filled with wildflowers grown from 20 million seeds. It is now a haven for bees, butterflies and other pollinators in the heart of the city.

SPACE TO STIR AND BE STIRRED

TOWER OF LONDON · HAMPTON COURT PALACE · BANQUETING HOUSE
KENSINGTON PALACE · KEW PALACE · HILLSBOROUGH CASTLE AND GARDENS

ABOUT THIS WALK

This circular walk around the moat gives you the opportunity to enjoy a moment of calm, and discover nature in the heart of London.

Entrance

Exit

Distance
0.5 miles / 800 meters

Suggested Time
Allow 20 minutes to explore, sit on benches, and enjoy the moat

Difficulty
The route is mostly level on gravel paths. There is a ramp with handrails at the start and end

Benches
Along the route, you will find benches to rest on. These are marked on the map.

Toilets
There are no toilets within the moat, but you'll find them after you exit the moat.

Points of Interest
There are points of interest market on the map. These relate to numbered sections within the guide.

Picnic Area
Please take all rubbish with you and do not leave any in the moat.

Grass Paths
These paths take you into the flowers and are a little bumpy so watch your step.

Look closely at the outer walls of the moat for plants growing on the bricks. A common wall plant is **ivy-leaf toadflax.** This was introduced from southern Europe in the 1600s as an ornamental plant. It has since spread through the city, thriving on old walls. It has delicate ivy-like leaves and bright purple flowers.

1 What other plants can you find growing on the walls surrounding the moat?

The iconic red **common poppy** symbolises remembrance for fallen soldiers. In 2014, to mark the 100 year anniversary of the First World War, this moat was filled with 888,246 ceramic poppies.

In today's moat, these flowers are a great source of nectar for insects. After it's pollinated, the flower produces seed pods which rattle when shaken. Each seed pod contains hundreds of tiny black seeds, which can remain dormant in the soil for 80 years.

Yarrow has broad clusters of tightly-packed flowers, ranging in colour from white to pink to yellow. It acts as a landing pad for insects and you can often find small flies and beetles feeding on the flower's sugary nectar.

Throughout history, yarrow has been valued for its healing properties. According to Greek mythology, the warrior Achilles carried yarrow into battle to heal wounds.

As you explore the moat, take some time to smell the different flowers

In rich shades of purple, mauve, ruby, pink and white, **verbena** is a tall plant with clusters of small flowers. Take a closer look at the tiny petals found on this plant.

Butterflies and moths love this plant. They use their long proboscis tongues to drink the flower's sweet nectar.

The **peacock butterfly** is named after the eyespots on it's wings, which resemble peacock bird feathers. These eyespots are flashed in defence to scare away potential predators.

With striking red-orange wings, **red admiral butterflies** are a common sight in the moat. Each spring, these butterflies arrive in London after their long migration journey from continental Europe and north Africa.

In dark shadows cast by ancient white stone
A fortress stands, with history's tales well-known.
Outside the Tower walls, a moat does trace,
Defender once, now a living embrace.

Nature returned, with petal and with wing,
Green buds transform to blossom come the spring.
Wildflowers bloom in a vibrant array,
Daisies, poppies and blue cornflowers sway.

Oh! What do you hear or smell or see?
Bumblebees singing soothing melodies,
From yarrow stems, a scent of sheer delight,
With ladybirds preparing to take flight.

In this garden, once a fortress' moat,
Wildlife flourishes, and butterflies float.
Tower of London, filled with jewels that shine,
Protects a meadow now, it's nature's time.

London is home to over 100 different types of **bee.** Most of the plants in the moat require insects to pollinate them. Without them, the flowers wouldn't be able to produce seeds.
Bees can be identified by their narrow waist and two pairs of wings.

Hoverflies are flies that have evolved stripy colours to mimic bees, though they cannot sting. To tell the difference, hoverflies only have one pair of wings and do not have a narrow waist.

Honey bee

Buff-tailed bumblebee

Marmalade hoverfly

As you walk through the moat, listen for bird song and the buzzing of insects

Ladybird beetles are often found feeding on aphids, on the head and stem of tall plants.

England is home to 46 types of ladybird. The 7-spot ladybird is the most recognisable.

Ladybirds have special glands in their feet which produce a harmless but strongly scented chemical called pyrazine. This gives them an unusual but recognisable scent.

7-spot ladybird
adult

7-spot ladybird
larva

If you find a ladybird, gently pick it up and smell it. What does it smell like?

Pigeons are a common bird spotted in the moat. Though they are sometimes thought of as pests, these birds are also known as rock doves and originally lived on cliffs. Over the past 10,000 years, they have adapted to live in our cities.

Pigeons can often be found pecking at the wildflower seeds in the moat.

Red bar

Checkered

Blue bar

Pigeons have several colour variations. Can you spot these 3 colours today?

In the past many different plants were grown in the moat, even fruits and vegetables. The allotments in this photo were planted as part of the Second World War 'Dig for Victory' campaign, which turned public green spaces into allotments. The sunny and sheltered south side of the moat was the perfect spot for growing.