Clatworthy reservoir lies in the Brendon Hills in west Somerset on the edge of Exmoor National Park. Surrounded by undulating hills, the reservoir collects the headwaters of the River Tone, providing a scenic setting for both fishing and walking. The reservoir was created in 1959 by construction of the concrete dam which spans the valley of the River Tone. When full the reservoir covers 52 hectares and contains more than 5,000 million litres of water. After treatment, the water is supplied to towns and villages throughout west Somerset and beyond.

Access

The Clatworthy Round is a walk of the entire five-mile perimeter of the reservoir, offering fantastic views of the water and the surrounding countryside. The route is mainly on natural surfaces (grass, stone and soil) and is generally wide enough for two adults side by side, although there are two narrower foot bridges.

It takes around three hours to complete the entire Clatworthy Round (depending on your walking pace), or you can go as far as you wish and then retrace your steps. Please note that you will find some steep sections – see the map above.

Sturdy footwear is advised and visitors must stay on the permitted path. Picnic benches are located at intervals along the route.

The Woodland Trail is a shorter loop of approximately one mile. It crosses the dam and then takes a footpath through woodland up to the ramparts of the Iron Age hill fort before returning along a wide track.

This route is mainly on natural surfaces and bark, and is only wide enough for one adult at a time at some points. The trail takes about 45 minutes to walk (depending on your pace). Again, sections of both the ascent and descent are steep and uneven in places.

There are other rights of way linking the Clatworthy Round to the villages of Stolford and Clatworthy, and a further footpath runs along the southern edge of the reservoir.

Ample parking, public toilets and picnic benches are located at the viewing area where the Clatworthy Round and Woodland Trail start. Visitors are welcome to use the drinks vending machine, decking, picnic benches and telescope at the fishing lodge.

Opening times

The car park is open daily. Closing times vary throughout the year, please check the closing time displayed by the gate when you arrive.

Angling

The reservoir provides anglers with fishing for rainbow and brown trout, either from its banks or from a boat. Anglers can hire fishing boats for rowing or with a motor, or alternatively may use their own motor (electric outboard only).

While the south bank is considered the best area for fishing, the seven water inlets at Clatworthy are all regarded as good spots for anglers. Good top of the water fishing is available with nymphs, while the deep areas respond to sinking lines and flashing lures.

There are facilities for disabled people at the reservoir's fishing lodge and a wheely boat is available for use on the reservoir. Clatworthy Fly Fishing Club (www.clatworthyffc.co.uk) fishes out of Clatworthy reservoir and information about the club and its competitions is available on the fishing lodge noticeboard.

For details about fishing at Clatworthy, please contact the ranger on 01984 624658.

Code of conduct

For the safety and enjoyment of all, please follow our code of conduct:

- no dogs are allowed as this is a water supply site
- please keep to the permissive paths
- never enter the water: swimming is not allowed
- please keep children safe at all times
- anglers must purchase a permit from the fishing lodge
- please respect the wildlife and do not pick wildflowers
- please co-operate with the ranger at all times and enjoy your visit.
There are four large woods around the reservoir, totalling approximately 45 hectares. The Clatworthy Round will take you through Clatworthy, Northern, Syndercombe and Stolford woods, and past Waysdown wood.

The woods are classed as ancient woodland, meaning that they have existed for more than 400 years. Before the reservoir was constructed, Clatworthy Wood was known as South Coppice and was part of the Carew family’s Clatworthy Estate.

Clatworthy and Northern Woods are upland oak woodlands, with tall mature sessile oaks and beech, patches of coppiced hazel, sycamore and an understorey of downy birch, rowan and holly.

In spring, look out for carpets of bluebells on the woodland floor, which give way to expanses of great woodrush alongside wood anemone and wood sorrel later in the year.

Frequently occurring herbs include greater stitchwort and the broad buckler-fern. You can also look out for hairy woodrush, wood sage, bilberry, hard fern, soft shield fern, lady fern and foxglove.

Syndercombe and Stolford Woods are also mainly oak habitat, but Waysdown Wood has a very different character, being broadly an ash woodland.

Although there are some planted larch, sweet chestnut and sycamore, ash and beech are the dominant trees. The ground flora here is more diverse than in the other woods and includes old woodland indicator plants such as moschatel, sanicle, enchanter’s nightshade and yellow archangel.

Mosses are abundant on the trees in these woods, with the site supporting one nationally scarce species and eight which are regionally important. The site also supports 14 notable species of lichen.

We are managing our woodland and scrub habitats for wildlife by eradicating invasive rhododendron and by small scale thinning, maintenance of glades and the retention and creation of dead wood habitat.

There are some areas of species-rich grassland around the site. Creeping soft-grass, red fescue, false oat-grass and purple moor-grass are the dominant grasses and flowers such as tormentil, pignut and greater bird’s foot trefoil are quite common.

We are working hard to conserve these species-rich areas of acid grassland. It is estimated that fewer than 30,000 hectares of lowland acid grassland now remain in the UK, of which 10 hectares can be found here. Characteristic species of this habitat include heath bedstraw, common and sheep’s sorrels, dog violets, devil’s-bit scabious, common knapweed, meadow vetchling and heath wood-rush.

You can find out more about the woods and grasslands on information boards along the Woodland Trail and Clatworthy Round.
Birds

Despite the expanse of water, the characteristics of the reservoir (including deep water and steep sided banks) mean that it’s home to a relatively small number of waterfowl and waders. When you look out over the water, see if you can spot:

- great crested grebe
- little grebe
- tufted duck
- cormorant
- mallard
- Canada goose
- heron

Occasional visitors include teal, gadwall and common sandpiper along the shore.

Our woods contain a much larger and more diverse bird population. While walking through the woods, listen out for common species such as great tit, blackbird and song thrush. You may also spot key species including: marsh tit, pied flycatcher, bullfinch and common redstart.

Butterflies

The grassland around the reservoir is home to several butterfly species. During the summer, look out for the small heath, small skipper, common blue, meadow brown, speckled wood, dark green fritillary, marbled white, orange tip, ringlet and silver-washed fritillary.

The rare and nationally declining small pearl-bordered fritillary can sometimes be seen between May and July. The adult butterflies feed on nectar rich plants such as thistle and bramble and lay their eggs on or near violets. The violets then become the main food source for their larvae. Interestingly, the larvae overwinter in dead leaves and bracken before emerging in spring to start feeding again.

Bugs

We have identified more than 1,000 invertebrate species at Clatworthy. Along the water’s edge you may see common blue and azure damselflies in summer, while large red-tailed and white-tailed bumblebee, and common carder bee, mix with hundreds of flies, grasshoppers, beetle, ant and spider species.

As you walk along the paths through the grassland around the reservoir, watch your feet during March to May as the violet oil beetle may amble across your path. The rarest species known on site is the cheese fly, which has only been recorded once before in England.

Bats

As dusk falls during spring and summer, bats begin to emerge on site. Ten species of bat use the reservoir, woods and surrounding land. We’ve found the common and soprano pipistrelle, brown long-eared, Daubenton’s, serotine, Natterer’s, noctule, greater and lesser horseshoe and whiskered/ Brandt’s bat at Clatworthy.

Daubenton’s bats feed on insects that they take close to the water’s surface using either their feet or tail membrane as a scoop. The waters of the reservoir are therefore an obvious attraction for these bats, also known as the ‘water bat’. They form colonies in holes of trees near water before moving to underground sites in October for winter hibernation.

The edges of our woodland are a key feeding area for bats. The mix of woodland and scrub, bordered by wide grass strips, provides a home to the insects which the bats feed on and habitat management is targeted at maintaining and improving this variety.

Elusive visitors

There are several other elusive visitors to the site which only come out at night. We have captured footage of otters at the water’s edge and observed hazel dormouse in one of the woods. Both species are endangered.

At least two types of deer live here. If you are walking quietly you may well see roe deer in the woods - the larger red deer is much more shy but you could see signs that they have passed, such as footprints in the mud.
Geology

The underlying geology of the area is the slate and shale of the Devonian period. The resulting landscape is characterised by rounded, open hilltops, with steep-sided valleys on mostly shallow and free-draining soils.

There are several important geological exposures around the site where you can appreciate the processes that created the landscape you see today and that influenced both the human and natural history of the site.

In the car park is a large, dark upright stone located in the middle of the turning circle. The side of the stone marked by the plaque is actually the undersurface of the bed of rock from which it came. It is an example of a finely grained sandstone-siltstone with a clay matrix.

The bulbous outcrops from the rock represent erosional hollows which had been cut into the sediments of a muddy sea floor by strong currents in an ancient ocean where the rock was laid down. These were then filled in by sediments which gradually became the rock you see today – the bulbous outcrops would originally have pointed upstream in the strong current.

Hill forts and industry

The geology has influenced the human history of the site. Deposits of iron ore in the surrounding hills were used during the Romano-British period to produce iron.

Close to the fishing lodge, pottery, tiles and iron slag from this period have been found, indicating the location of an iron smelting site. Syndercombe Farm, which is now beneath the reservoir, was the site of a deserted settlement recorded in the Domesday Book and the name “Syndercombe” is said to derive from the remains of smelting.

If you follow the Woodland Trail up from the dam wall, deep within the wood you will come across the ramparts of Clatworthy Camp, an Iron Age hill fort pre-dating the Romano-British remains. The hillfort is roughly triangular in shape, covering an area of about 5.6 hectares.

Protected by a single earth and stone bank with a ditch cut into solid rock, little is known of the fort’s history. There are only 150 known examples of this type of fort in the country, hence it is protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument and we are carefully thinning out the trees on the banks of the hill fort to prevent them damaging the monument.

Find out more

You can find out more about the habitats, history and species around the reservoir at several interpretation boards on the Clatworthy Round route.

For more information call 0345 600 4 600 or visit www.wessexwater.co.uk

If you would like to pass on records of the wildlife you’ve seen at Clatworthy, please email us at env.info@wessexwater.co.uk