Sutton Bingham reservoir is located on the Somerset and Dorset border four miles south of Yeovil, just off the A37 Dorchester Road. Car parking is available on site and the reservoir offers a range of activities, including a nature trail, birdwatching viewpoint, angling and a picnic area with children’s play equipment. The car park and visitor facilities are only open from March to October.

**Public footpaths**

Only one public footpath crosses the reservoir site, on the southern inlet to the Reservoir close to Netherstoke. Footpaths from East Coker, Barwick and Clifton Maybank come very close to the site but would require short stretches of walking along country lanes to access the main facilities. The Monarchs Way long distance footpath runs approximately 1.5km west of the reservoir (at its nearest approach).

**Cycle paths**

National cycle route 26 (from Portishead to Portland Bill) runs past the western side of the reservoir – to access the main facilities, just cycle up the short entrance road to the reservoir.

**Code of conduct**

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

- remember the reservoirs are for public water supply
- no dogs are allowed except on a public right of way and then on a leash
- please keep to public areas
- do not enter the water unless fishing and remember the water is deep in places
- please keep children safe at all times
- respect the wildlife and do not pick wildflowers
- anglers must purchase a permit and read the rules of the fishery before fishing
- anglers must check behind them before backcasting
- please co-operate at all times with the ranger and enjoy your visit.
Access around the whole of the reservoir is not possible, but a picnic area with views of the reservoir is open to visitors and from there a short easy walk along a section of the western bank will take you through traditional hay meadows, rich in wildlife, to a bird viewing point. From here you can see some of the bird species at the reservoir.

Other facilities at the site include a children’s play area and toilets. The car park and visitor facilities are only open during from March to October.

Because of safety concerns regarding incidents of dog fouling and lack of supervision by some owners, no dogs are allowed around this reservoir.

Boats of many sizes use the reservoir which is home to the Sutton Bingham Sailing Club, the Sutton Bingham & District Canoe Club and the Yeovil and District Model Boat Club.

Excellent fly fishing for rainbow and brown trout, either from the bank or a boat, is available from March to October every year. The reservoir offers some excellent top water trout fishing both early and late season and is stocked with 12,500-15,000 trout averaging 2lb each with some fish weighing double figures. Facilities include a spacious fishing lodge, complete with a large veranda overlooking the water. A feature of the lodge is the fish preparation room, where anglers can gut and clean their catch.

You may use your own motor (electric outboard only) and fishing boats can be hired for rowing. A Wheelie boat is available for wheelchair users.

The reservoir was constructed in 1955 and when full covers 142 acres, holding more than 2,600 million litres of water, which is treated and supplied to towns and villages throughout south Somerset.

There has been a settlement at the site of the reservoir since the medieval period and the Manor House and Norman church remain. The church, which is dedicated to All Saints, was formerly a chapel to Malmesbury Abbey and contains medieval wall paintings of the death, burial and coronation of the Virgin.

Beneath the surface of the reservoir, east of the Manor House, lie the remains of Sutton Mill, which is shown on maps dating back to 1699, while pottery from the 11th and 12th centuries has been found in the west pond of the reservoir.

The reservoir has areas of valuable grassland around the site which supports important plant species, including a population of the scarce meadow saffron, which is also called Autumn Crocus as it flowers in autumn. Much of the grassland along the western side of the reservoir, through which you can walk, is maintained as traditional hay meadow. The meadow supports a diverse range of plants and invertebrates (animals without a backbone) such as butterflies, bugs, bees, hoverflies and flies. In summer you can see flowers that used to be common on farmland, such as ox eye daisy, common knapweed, meadow vetchling, bird’s foot trefoil and salad burnett, as well as the scarcer grass vetchling and corky fruited water dropwort.

This traditional hay meadow is of significant wildlife importance locally and is maintained by our rangers who cut the grass once a year and ensure no pesticides or insecticides are applied to the land. The hay is then fed to the horses on site as supplementary winter feed.

To see a video about Sutton Bingham reservoir visit our YouTube channel – search ‘wessex water.’
The grassland around the reservoir is home to many bugs only rarely glimpsed, but which are an integral part of the web of wildlife on site. A total of 632 different species of invertebrate have been recorded among the hay meadows, 21 of which are rare or threatened.

As you walk through the meadows, watch out for the crickets and grasshoppers jumping out from underfoot – the fields are home to speckled bush and long winged conehead crickets and meadow grasshoppers. Moving among the grasses and flowers are a number of butterfly species, including the large skipper, brown argus, common blue, painted lady, small tortoiseshell, speckled wood, marbled white, meadow brown and ringlet. Silver-washed fritillaries may be occasionally spotted.

Along the banks of the road on the edge of the meadows look out for mining, or digger, bees which nest in burrows in the ground. Unlike the honey bee, mining bees are solitary bees with each mining bee female usually digging her own individual burrow to rear her young. Mining bees range in size from about the size of honey bees to much smaller. The larger bees are furry and usually darker in colour than honey bees. Some are brightly striped, while others are a shiny metallic green. They are extremely beneficial insects, of considerable importance in the pollination of many different types of plants and their burrowing does not harm vegetation and may actually be of service in aerating the soil.

We have identified at least nine species of bat on or around the reservoir (with the most common at the top of the list):
- Common pipistrelle
- Soprano pipistrelle
- Daubentons
- Natterer
- Whiskered/brandt
- Serotine
- Noctule
- Lesser horseshoe
- Barbastelle

Bats have been recorded throughout the site, but we have found they focus along woodland edges and several species constantly feed over the reservoir, including Daubentons, pipistrelles and noctules.

The great expanse of water is an obvious attraction for Daubentons bats which feed on insects they take from close to the water surface using either their large feet or tail membrane as a scoop – leading to their historical name of the water bat. They fly at about 15mph within a few centimetres of the water surface and are often reminiscent of a small hovercraft. In summer, Daubentons form colonies in underground sites (such as caves, mines or cellars) or in holes of trees near to water before moving towards winter hibernation in October in underground sites.

In contrast, the woodland edges and hedgerows around the reservoir (particularly at its southern end) attract high numbers of common pipistrelles commuting from nearby roosts and feeding. Their cousins, the soprano pipistrelle are mostly drawn to the streams and rivers leading into the reservoir.

The lesser horseshoe and barbastelle bats are some of the rarest in the country. Lesser horseshoe bats have been recorded feeding during the summer over the horse grazed fields close to the dam as they like to feed on the insects that are attracted to the horse dung. A single barbastelle has been recorded in the woodland adjacent to the railway line. These bats are very rare and recent research suggests they like to roost and feed near water.
The reservoir is used by different bird groups through the seasons, playing host to at least 88 different bird species. While some live here all year round, most are visitors for just part of the year. The west pond and area around the causeway attract the most diversity, while the conservation area at the southern end of the reservoir attracts many breeding or overwintering birds.

Raptors can be seen at any time of year, not only buzzards and kestrels, but also peregrines, sparrowhawks and during spring and summer hobbies. Hunting around the edge of the reservoir are grey herons, joined now by little egret which first appeared in the UK in 1989 and first bred in Dorset in 1996.

During summer, the reservoir provides nesting sites for commoner birds such as blue tit, great tit, robin and blackbird. Migrating warblers such as common whitethroat, blackcap, willow warbler and chiffchaff are frequently seen and heard but other birds that are less often seen but also breed here regularly include nuthatch, tree-creeper, lesser whitethroat, spotted flycatcher, marsh tit and reed bunting.

Fewer water birds spend summer here but great crested grebe can always be seen and small numbers of little grebe have been known to breed. Mallard, coot and Canada goose are here all year and are very easy to spot – with luck you may see a kingfisher.

In August, the first migrant waders start passing through. Redshank, common sandpiper and green sandpiper are regular visitors if the water levels are low while whimbrel, little ringed and ringed plovers, black-tailed godwit and greenshank may occasionally be seen.

The reservoir is on the route of many migrant birds in spring and autumn. Large flocks of swallows and house martins gather over the water to feed on the abundant insects during their migration. If you are very lucky you may spot an osprey, who occasionally visit the reservoir as a stopover during their migration from Africa to Scotland and northern England. In autumn and winter, also look out for redwing and fieldfare in the hedges and fields.

During winter, the reservoir is important for many birds that fly in from colder climes to overwinter including:

- large numbers of wigeon (from Iceland and Scandinavia) and teal (from the Baltic and Siberia)
- pochard (from eastern Europe and Russia),
- tufted duck and snipe (who may live in the area year round, but whose numbers increase with additional winter visitors from Iceland and northern Europe)

- gadwall
- coot