

# NATURE FINDERS

at Headstone Manor



**Terrain:** flat, but off path in places.  
**Duration:** 30 mins



# Welcome to the NATURE FINDERS Trail!

Headstone Manor and the surrounding parkland is a little piece of old rural Harrow, with its farms and villages.

This walk will guide you around the moat and Headstone Manor island, giving you a glimpse into the rich natural history of this special place.

Start your walk by the moat information panel.

- 1 This is the only complete, water-filled moat in London. Built around 700 years ago, it was an impressive sign of Headstone Manor's importance.

The moat also protected the house from flooding. The ground here is heavy clay, so water can't easily drain into the ground. But it collected in the moat instead, a safe distance from the Manor House.

The moat is home to a variety of waterbirds, including mallard, coot and moorhen. Look carefully and you may see a heron, or even a kingfisher.

- 2 Headstone used to be one of the largest farms in the London area. The outlying fields were gradually swallowed up by new factories and houses, until the last farmer moved to Pinner Park Farm in 1928. The open space that remained became a community recreation ground.

Follow the path around the corner of the moat.



Kingfisher



Moorhen



Coot



Mallard duck

## Hops

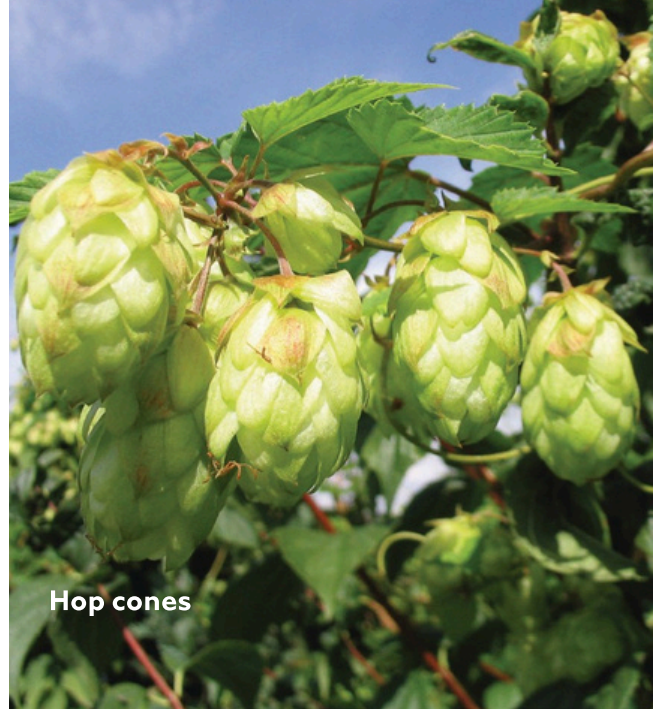
Look out for hops, tall climbing plants, which die back and regrow each year. You can see them twisting through other plants by the edge of the moat.

Hops have probably been grown in England since the 1400s. Female hop plants have distinctive cones, which are still used to brew beer to this day.

- 3 Old maps show a spring rising here, and the ground is still often boggy underfoot! The waters from here eventually lead into the River Thames.

Continue around the next corner...

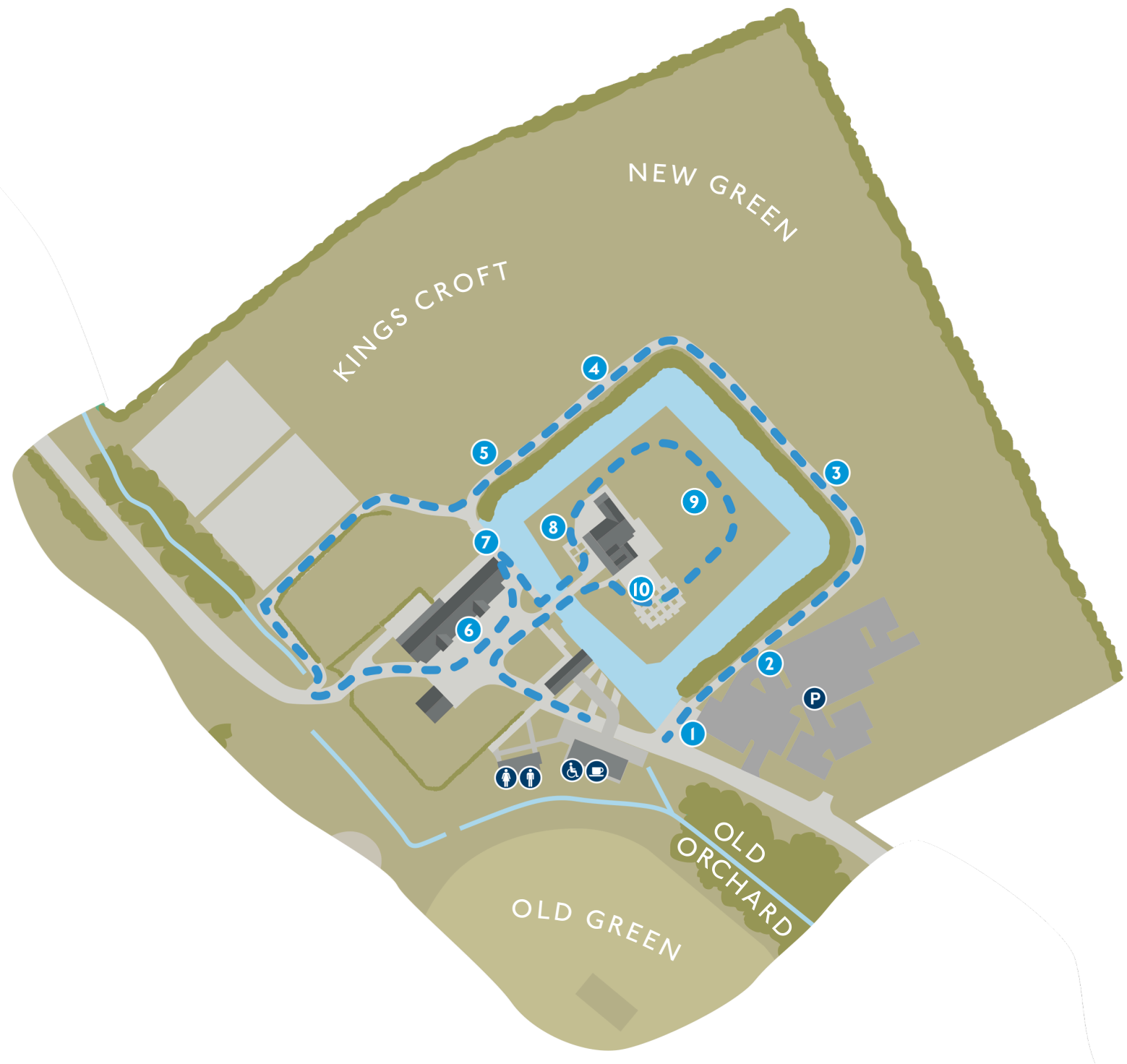
- 4 To the right is the old field known as the King's Croft. A 'croft' is an old English word meaning a small piece of arable land close to a house. Until the 1960s there was evidence of farming here. People could step from ridge to ridge across the furrows, which had been made by ploughing. This area often became boggy in wet weather.



Hop cones



Ridge and furrow



KINGS CROFT

NEW GREEN

OLD GREEN

OLD ORCHARD

P



- 1
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- 3
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- 10



Sloe berries



Blackthorn hedge

5 The name 'Headstone' comes from the Anglo-Saxon names 'Heggeton' or 'Heggston', meaning a farm surrounded by hedges. Hundreds of years ago, this farm was probably surrounded by blackthorn or hawthorn hedges, both of which would quickly have grown into a prickly barrier.

## Blackthorn

The blackthorn (or sloe) is laden with beautiful white flowers in early spring. Its leaves provide food for the caterpillars of many species of moth.

Blackthorn wood is hard-wearing, so it was traditionally used for making walking sticks and tool parts. According to folklore, it was also used for making witches' wands!

The blackthorn's name comes from its black, spiky thorns. Its fruits (sloes) are traditionally used for flavouring gin.

Take the path to the right and down the narrow path between the meadow at the back of the Great Barn and the tennis courts.



Oak tree

## Hawthorn

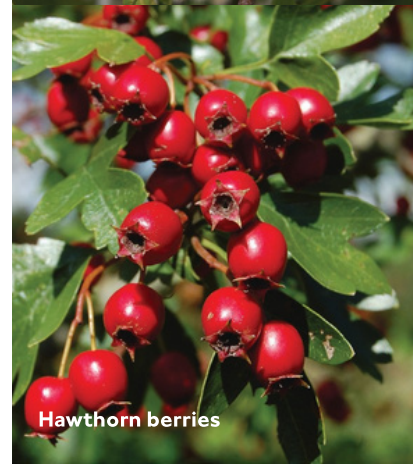
Hawthorn is nicknamed 'the May Tree', making it the only British tree to be called after the month when it blossoms. Hawthorns can support over 330 species of insect.

Hawthorn blossom was traditionally associated with death. More recently, scientists discovered one of the chemicals in hawthorn blossom is also one of the first chemicals produced when animal tissue decays. So, the traditional association makes sense after all!

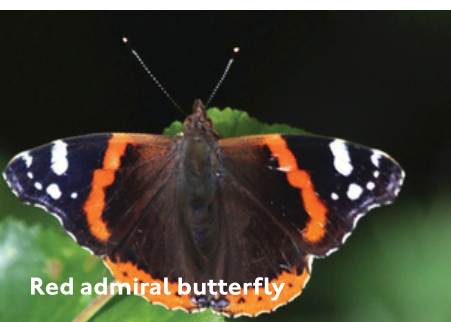
Take a left at the end of this path to enter the old farm yard.



Hawthorn blossom



Hawthorn berries



Red admiral butterfly



Song thrush



Oak tree

- 6 On your left is the Tudor Great Barn (built in around 1506).

Headstone Manor was originally built with sturdy oak beams. You can still see them today in the Great Hall and the Great Barn.

Oak trees produce one of nature's hardest and strongest timbers. This native tree has become a symbol of strength and survival, and an emblem of England.

Oaks are brilliant for wildlife because they support more species than any other native tree. They can be seen growing at the back of the moat.

Turn left at the end of the Great Barn to look down at the moat.

- 7 The banks of the moat are home to many plants including bramble, cow parsley and dock. Plants such as yellow flag flourish at the water's edge.

### Yellow flag iris

Yellow flag iris is a tall plant that thrives in damp, marshy areas and on riverbanks. In some parts of the country it's known as 'sword grass' because of its blade-like leaves. But it's most famous for its large yellow flowers or 'flags', which bloom between May and July. The 'fleur-de-lis' that is often used on coats of arms may be based on the yellow iris.

Go over the bridge to Headstone Manor (built in around 1310).

- 8 Take a moment to enjoy the smells of the plants in the herb garden, including sage and lavender.

After that, go around the building to the rear.



Yellow flag iris



Mugwort



Emperor dragonfly

Please be careful on the island, because the edges of the moat are not fenced.

- 9 We know from old records and maps that the garden around the house was used as an orchard in the past. There is still a walnut tree, an apple tree and a pear tree on the island today.
- 10 This fine old yew tree can be seen in the 1800 illustration of Headstone Manor, shaped into a human form. Yew trees were often used in topiary, and were commonly found in churchyards. Their strong, flexible wood was also useful for making longbows! The yew tree here is around 300 years old.

Blackbirds and song thrushes enjoy eating yew berries, but almost all parts of yew trees are highly poisonous to humans.



Blackbird

Follow the path back to the bridge and leave the island, bearing left just after the Small Barn.

The trail finishes at the bee-friendly planters outside the visitor centre.



Apple



Woodpecker



## Explorer Backpacks

Families can enjoy our explorer bags full of activities to help younger children find and learn things in the museum. Borrow one from our Volunteer Wardens in The Parlour.

## Do you have a smartphone?

Use [www.uksafari.com/wildfiles](http://www.uksafari.com/wildfiles) to find out more about the plants and animals you can see around Headstone Manor.

## Make your own trail with:

<http://www.wildlifewatch.org.uk/spotting-sheets>

## Find out more about our native trees at:

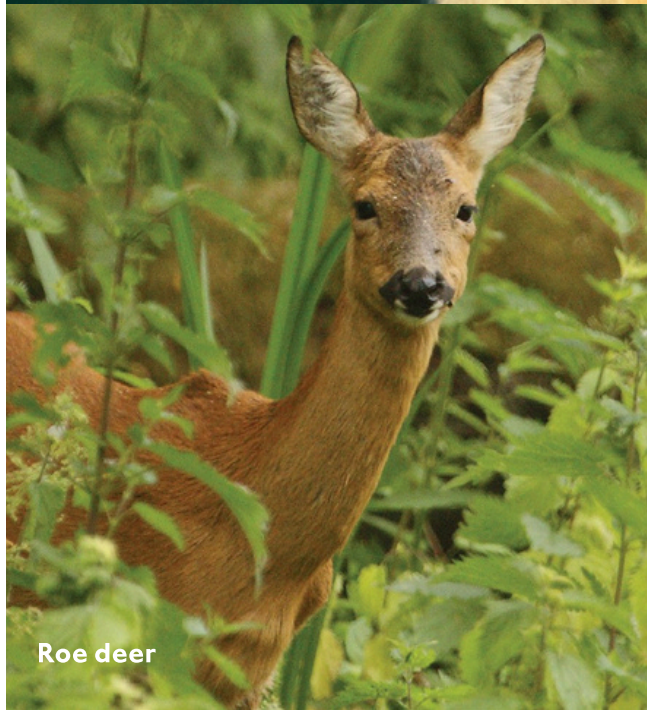
[www.woodlandtrust.org.uk](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk)



Fox

With thanks to the Harrow Natural History Society (and particularly the late A.M. Pollard, who funded the original trail on which this version is based).

This trail was made in memory of Geoff Corney, who loved this place.



Roe deer