

Valleyfield Estate Forth Nature Counts Survey Walk



Valleyfield woods are on the site of the former Valleyfield House and Estate which flourished in the 19th century but fell into disrepair in the early part of the 20th. Very little remains of the house now but there are still some signs of the landscaped gardens, the only Scottish commission of the famous designer Humphry Repton.

The site is now owned by Fife Council and is cared for in part by an active volunteer group, West Fife Woodlands. There is an Inner Forth Landscape Initiative (IFLI) project here to restore the historic orchard in the House's former kitchen garden. This will involve planting a wildflower meadow and hedgerows as well as up to 100 fruit trees, providing a great boost to local wildlife – as well as fruit for the human community.

<http://www.innerforthlandscape.co.uk/projects/conserving-restoring/valleyfield-estate-community-orchard>

The woodlands were largely replanted by the Forestry Commission in the 1930s and consist mainly of mature larch, spruce, Scots pine and beech, along with silver birch and ash. They support a thriving community of woodland birds and give shelter to mammals such as roe deer. In early Spring the site is noted for its spectacular displays of snowdrops.

The site is bisected by the Bluther Burn, whose waters provide the perfect habitat for wagtails. Kingfishers and otters have also been reported here.

The Survey Walk

The Valleyfield survey walk is approximately 1.6km long and should take about an hour to walk. Remember to walk slowly, noting down everything you'd like to record as you go.

Begin your walk at the car park (accessed from the B9037) information board and walk downhill following the path through the woodland. This section is mostly mixed broadleaved and conifer woodland so take a look at the tree species around you and watch for blackbirds in the undergrowth, as well as blue tits and grey squirrels in higher branches. You're right on the front line in the battle between grey and red squirrels here. *(NT003875 at centre)*

Cross the bridge and you will reach a gate leading into the kitchen gardens with their newly planted orchard and wildflowers where you'll begin **section 2** of the transect. Follow the path to the right into the woods past the old gardeners cottage. This section will take in a short stretch of the Bluther Burn where Kingfishers have been sighted in the past – watch for a blue and orange blur flying quickly over the water. *(NT002874 at centre)*

The path doubles back through the woods and comes back out again at the orchard where you'll begin **section 3**. As you look at the orchard, you will see a gate in front of you which is usually kept locked. Turn to your right and walk around the west perimeter of the orchard fence. When you reach the opposite side of the orchard, open the south gate and walk a loop through the orchard itself. This allows you to generate records within the fenced-off orchard which may make for interesting comparisons with the species found outside of the fencing. Exit through the south gate where you entered and rejoin the main path where **section 4** begins. *(NT002873 at centre)*

This long section takes in a stretch of coniferous woodland. You'll notice trails leading off from the path into the trees, many are made by roe deer, which follow traditional trails around their territory. Look for their slotted hoofprints in any soft earth. You may also spot cleared areas of earth where they have gathered overnight, often accompanied by droppings and hair. *(NT003872 at centre)*

The path will soon make a dogleg turn, just next to the bench and finger post, heading back northeast, **section 5** will begin at this point. Again you'll be walking alongside coniferous woodland to your left but now it is interspersed to a greater degree with broadleaf species such as beech. On your right there is the opening to an area of long grass and shrubs, together with a thicket of young ash trees. *(NT004871 at centre)*

Continue on past this and your walk will move into **section 6**. Again conifers such as larch dominate, listen out for the shrill, piercing calls of jays which inhabit the area. *(NT005872 at centre)*



Photo Paul Barclay

At the path junction ahead take the leftmost path where **section 7** meanders down the slope to the banks of the Bluther Burn.

As you cross the bridge, you start **section 8**. Check the structure and prominent rocks above the high water line for signs of spraints left behind by otters. Turn left at the junction ahead, following the lowermost path which follows the

course of the burn. *(NT005873 at centre)*

Halfway along this path you'll move onto the **final section** of your walk, opposite two stone supports on either side of the burn, just before the weir. This section of fast moving water makes the perfect habitat for wagtails and dippers. *(NT004873 at centre)* **End your walk** just before the bridge which you crossed earlier on section 1.

Thank you for taking the time to walk the Inner Forth Nature Counts survey walk around Valleyfield Estate. Don't forget to log on to iRecord and upload your records

<http://www.brc.ac.uk/irecord/enter-inner-forth-records>

Thank you for making Forth Nature Count!

This survey walk is part of IFLI's Forth Nature Counts project which aims to increase the number of verified biological records for the Inner Forth area. We are doing this by encouraging volunteers and local people to become citizen scientists through surveying sites then adding their wildlife records to

our iRecord page; running a series of free wildlife identification workshops covering a wide range of species; and promoting wildlife recording through IFLI's social media pages, website and e-newsletter. Find out more about this project on our website:

<http://www.innerforthlandscape.co.uk/projects/recording-celebrating/forth-nature-counts>

If you'd like more information you can contact Kate Fuller, IFLI Community Engagement Officer on info@innerforthlandscape.co.uk or 01324 831 568

A quick look at some species you might spot at Valleyfield



Otter (*Lutra lutra*)

Spotting an otter is a tricky business as these shy animals are generally nocturnal. Look out for their spraints, which they leave on prominent places to mark their territory. Otter spraints are black, tarry, contain fish bones and usually have a somewhat pleasant smell.



Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*)

A shy, colourful member of the crow family. Jays love woodland but can be very difficult to see as these intelligent birds rarely move out from cover and tend to avoid people. You might see them burying acorns in autumn. Listen for their screaming call and look for the white flash on their rump as they fly.



Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*)

More colourful than the name suggests, these birds have a grey back with a bright yellow undertail, extending up to the breast in males. Likes to hang around waterways hunting for insects. Watch for the fast, undulating flight and the 'wagging' tail that gives the species its name.



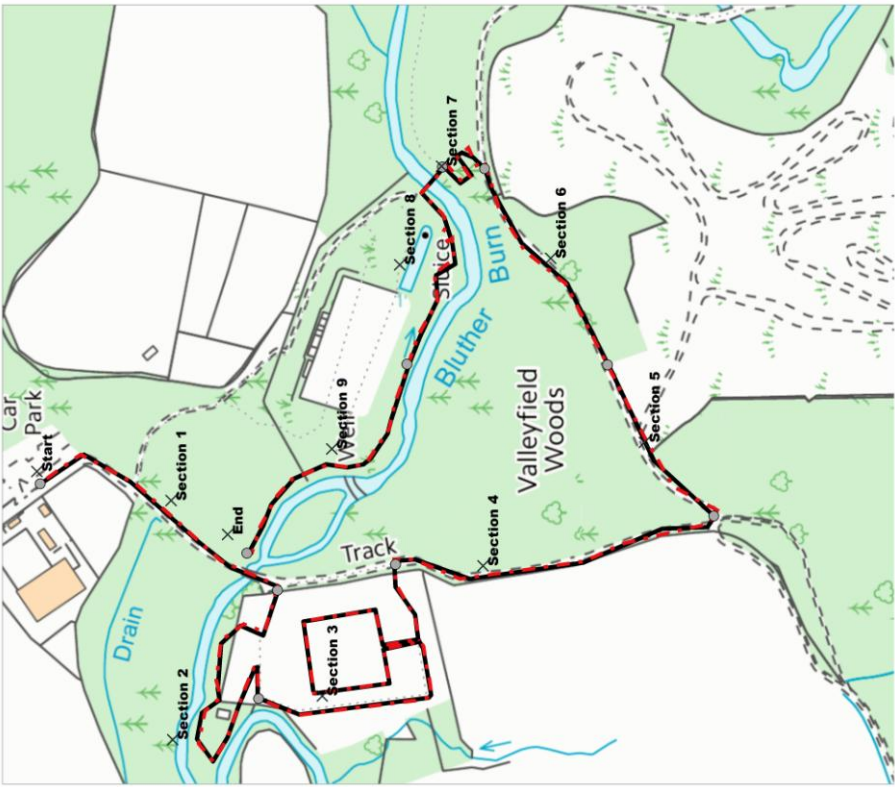
Garden Bumblebee (*Bombus hortorum*)

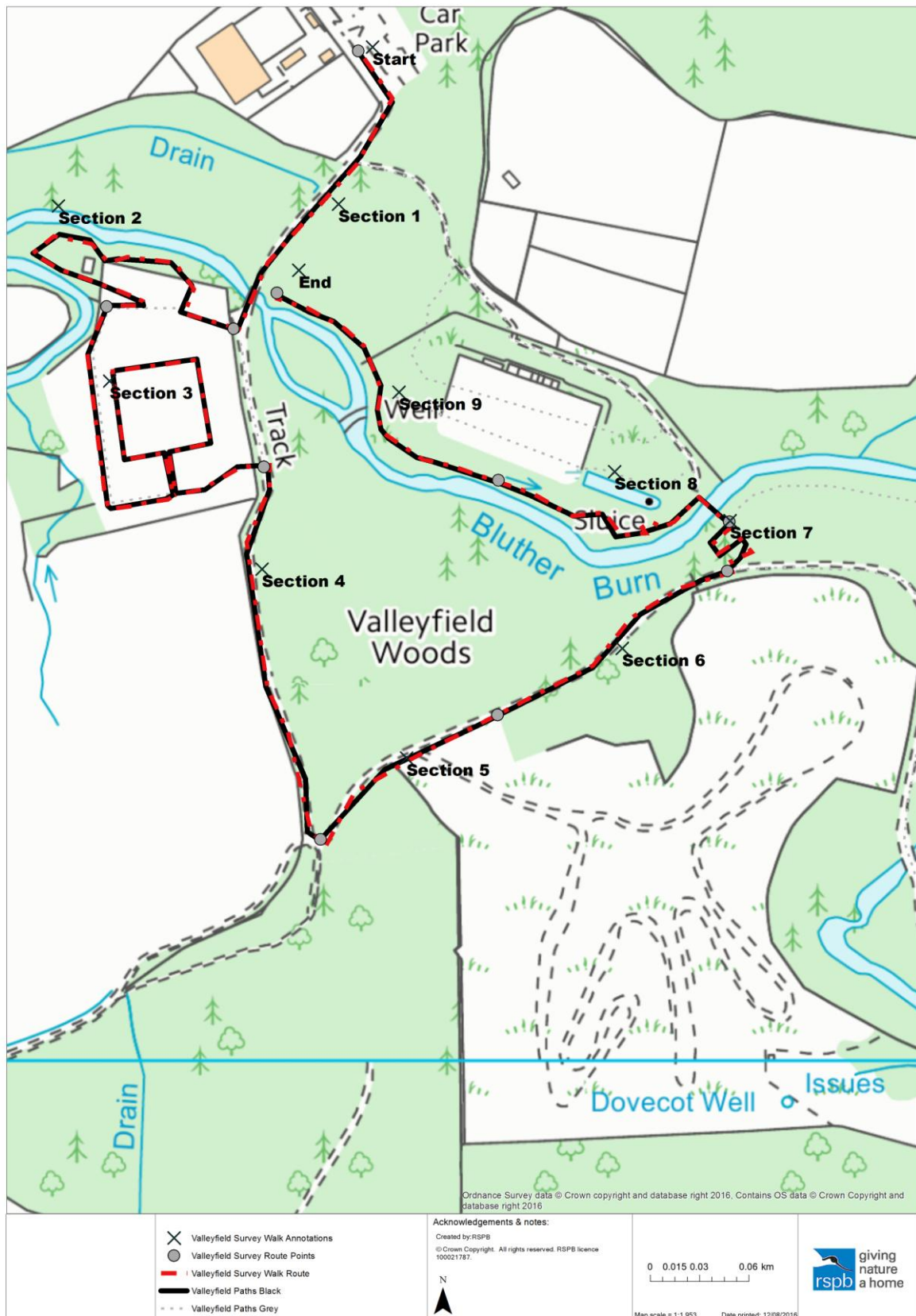
A medium sized bumblebee with two yellow stripes on the thorax (one more than the similar looking buff-tailed), one yellow stripe on the abdomen and a white tail. Garden bumblebees have a noticeably long face, tongue and legs.



Small Tortoiseshell (*Aglais urticae*)

One of our most common butterflies – but a species that is showing worrying signs of decline. Can be seen on any sunny day of the year but most active May to September. Often found near nettles which are an important food source.

Transect Name		Valleyfield		
Insert a map or even a simple drawing of your transect location and route				
Location name		Valleyfield Woods	OS 6 fig grid ref (at centre of transect)	NT004873
County		Fife	Transect Length (m)	1615
Section	6 Figure Grid ref (at centre of section)	Length (m)	Habitat Description (e.g. farmland, urban etc.)	
1	NT003875	215	Mixed broadleaved and coniferous woodland	
2	NT002874	240	Wildflowers, Mixed broadleaved and coniferous woodland, Running water	
3	NT002873	180	Wildflowers, Orchard/Lines of trees, Hedgerow	
4	NT003872	235	Mixed broadleaved and coniferous woodland	
5	NT004871	135	Mixed broadleaved and coniferous woodland, Broadleaved woodland, Shrubs, Tall herbs/Grasses	
6	NT005872	170	Mixed broadleaved and coniferous woodland	
7	NT006873	80	Broadleaved woodland, Shrubs	
8	NT005873	165	Running water, Broadleaved woodland, Shrubs	
9	NT004873	195	Running water, Broadleaved woodland, Shrubs	



Name			
Location		Date	

Section	Species Name	Comments