

A great family day out, rain or shine!

# Fort Victoria

— COUNTRY PARK —

**Wildlife watching**

**Woodland walks**

**Rockpooling**

**Fossil hunts**

**Nature trail**



## Coastal Country Park

Around the fort are twenty hectares of native woodland and half a mile of rocky beach for you to explore. The woodland is home to red squirrels, bats, dormice and more.

There are many paths around the site and the Isle of Wight's coastal footpath passes through. Discover viewpoints for wonderful views of the Solent, Hurst Castle and The Needles.

The beach is great for rock pooling and fossil hunting; you might find a piece of turtle's shell or even an alligator's tooth - remains of animals which lived here millions of years ago.

The beach is also a popular spot for fishing, although it is not suitable for swimming due to the fast currents.



## Fort Victoria Country Park

Westhill Lane, Yarmouth, Isle of Wight, PO41 0RR

- Extensive woodland and beach to explore.
- Great views across the Solent.
- Grassy areas for picnics.
- Fixed barbecues available.
- Free parking and toilets, including accessible toilet.
- Dogs are welcome all year round; please pick up after your dog.

A short walk or bus ride from Yarmouth

## Visitor attractions

Great places to visit - whatever the weather!

**Exhibition and gift shops**

**Island Planetarium**

**The Imaginarium**

**Reptilium**

**Verdi's Cafe**



[fortvictoria.co.uk](http://fortvictoria.co.uk)

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\*There is a charge for some activities and attractions, please see website for more information. Activities and attractions subject to availability, please check website for up-to-date information and news on special events.

## Nature at Fort Victoria

The diverse woodlands, cliffs and foreshore at Fort Victoria Country Park are home to many species of plants and animals.



Follow the trail to find out about the woodland wildlife or, if the tide is out, head for the shore to explore the rockpools, plus see if you can discover extra 'wooden wildlife' around the park!

## Geology

### Rocks

The Isle of Wight is formed from many layers of sedimentary rock later folded by global plate movements.

About 70 million years ago the North Atlantic began to widen, the Earth's crust each side of the new ocean began to jostle into new positions forcing Africa northwards into Europe. This pressure caused substantial buckling of the Earth's crust - forming the Alps and folding the Island to form the South Downs and central Downs.

The youngest rocks on the Island were deposited in a shallow basin on its northern half - the oldest rocks remained to the south.

### Fossils

The cliffs at Fort Victoria are from the boundary of the Oligocene and Eocene around 34 to 32 million years ago.

At that time the northern coast was covered by a large shallow lagoon that stretched north into the New Forest and westwards towards Poole. The southern half of the Island consisted of low hills.

The warm climate was home to reptiles, birds, mammals and many insects. Along the beach at Fort Victoria you can still find fossilised turtle shell, alligator armour and teeth, and thousands of broken white shells. Today these animals live in warmer lands much further to the south.

## History

### Fort Victoria

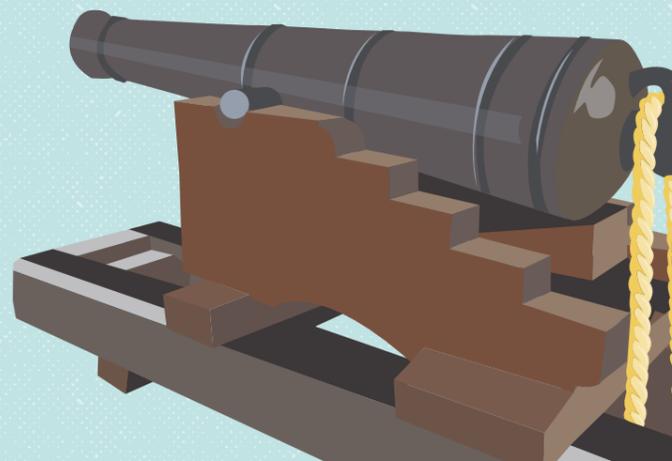
Situated a short distance from Yarmouth, overlooking the Solent, Fort Victoria has had a long and interesting history.

The fort was commissioned by Queen Victoria to defend the Solent from French invasion, designed to work in partnership with the other fortifications along this stretch of coast.

By the time it was completed in 1855, the threat from France had receded and advances in weapons technology meant that Fort Victoria was soon outdated without seeing any action.

However, the fort continued to be used by the military for another hundred years, playing important roles in searchlight and sea mine development, as well as in World War 2.

See genuine cannons, including one set on a replica mount in its original position.



## On the shore

The beach at Fort Victoria is a fascinating place, with sandy stretches and rocky pools as well as ever-changing views of the busy Solent.

On the beach there is much to look for, with many different seaweeds in red, green and brown. At low tide, look out for limpets and sea anemones on the rocks, with shore crabs, small fish and shrimps to be found around the rockpools.

Along the strand line, where the high tide comes up to, you could find empty crab shells, cuttlefish bones and many different seashells, and maybe even a mermaid's purse - the egg cases of dogfish and rays.

## Sea birds

Many types of sea bird can be spotted on the coast. You might see a cormorant drying its wings on the rocks, terns diving for fish, oystercatchers probing in the sand, and several types of seagull.

## Fossils

The beach is a great place to find fossils washed out of the soft rocks in the cliffs.

Look among the shingle for dark coloured smooth or patterned stones with a honeycomb texture inside. This is likely to be a piece of fossilised bone or turtle shell.

Many of the pebbles on the beach are packed with fossilised shells. Look for white spiral or curved shapes squashed into the rocks.

## On the slopes

There are many wildflowers in the woodland glades and on the slopes. You may also find harts tongue fern and horsetails; these are ancient plants which have changed little since the days of the dinosaurs.

Several types of orchid including spotted, southern marsh and occasionally bee orchids grow here. They are beautiful plants; please leave them for others to enjoy.

The trees on the slopes become bent and stunted by their exposed position; many have fallen or slipped because of the erosion.

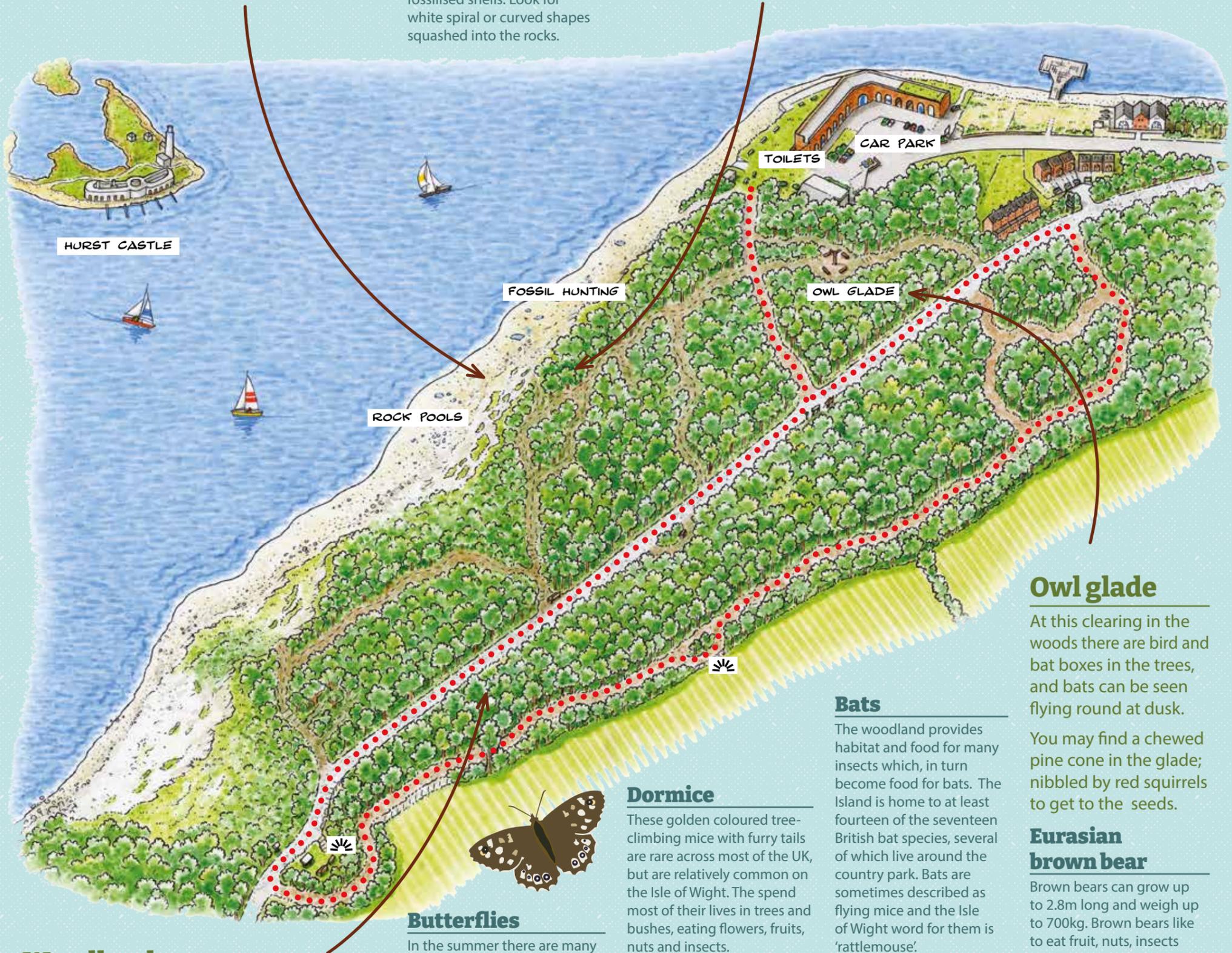
The landslip area is ideal habitat for adders, which like to bask in a sunny spot.

## Adders

Adders are Britain's only venomous snake. They can grow up to 90cm in length on their diet of small animals such as mice, voles and newts.

The distinctive dark-coloured zigzag pattern along its back and 'V' on its head makes an adder easy to identify. However, you will be lucky to spot one as they are timid creatures; hiding from larger animals and people.

If you get bitten, you would find it a very painful experience, but you would live to tell the tale.



## Woodland

The woodland at Fort Victoria is recently established, having grown up since the Second World War. Before then, the area would have been kept clear so that the military could have a good view along the coast. There are still signs of old fortifications in the woodland, including a pit which was the entrance to underground engine rooms.

The woodland consists of a good mix of tree and shrub species including plenty of elm. This is unusual as most large elm trees have been lost to dutch elm disease. Around the base of the pine trees you will probably find pinecones that have been chewed up by the red squirrels in order to get the edible seeds out.

## Butterflies

In the summer there are many butterflies to look out for. In the woodland clearings you may see speckled wood, peacock and red admiral, as well as the rarer white admiral and silver laced fritillary. In the open areas, look out for blues, tortoiseshell, meadow brown and the black-and-white marbled white.

## Minibeasts

Dead and rotting wood is a great habitat for many insects and fungi, Rangers use felled logs in place of standing dead trees to provide homes for these minibeasts. You might spot spiders, centipedes, woodlice, bugs, bees and wasps.

## Dormice

These golden coloured tree-climbing mice with furry tails are rare across most of the UK, but are relatively common on the Isle of Wight. They spend most of their lives in trees and bushes, eating flowers, fruits, nuts and insects.

Dormice are known for being sleepyheads, as they are nocturnal and hibernate all winter. Their name comes from the Latin, *dormir* which means to sleep.

## Birds

You're likely to see common birds such as robins, pigeons, blue tits and blackbirds in the wood and its clearings. Also look out for green woodpeckers and listen out for noisy jays.

Soaring above the wood you might spot a raven, buzzard or kestrel - or possibly even a rare peregrine falcon.

## Bats

The woodland provides habitat and food for many insects which, in turn become food for bats. The Island is home to at least fourteen of the seventeen British bat species, several of which live around the country park. Bats are sometimes described as flying mice and the Isle of Wight word for them is 'rattlemouse'.

## Red squirrels

If you are lucky you may see a red squirrel. On the Island they are protected from the invading greys by the Solent, separating the island from the mainland.

Red squirrels eat a varied diet of nuts, seeds, berries, insects, fungi and the occasional bird's egg.

Squirrels build ball-shaped nests known as dreys. Babies are known as kittens; born helpless but emerging from the nest after around seven weeks, looking like slightly smaller adults.

## Owl glade

At this clearing in the woods there are bird and bat boxes in the trees, and bats can be seen flying round at dusk.

You may find a chewed pine cone in the glade; nibbled by red squirrels to get to the seeds.

## Eurasian brown bear

Brown bears can grow up to 2.8m long and weigh up to 700kg. Brown bears like to eat fruit, nuts, insects and mammals. Brown bears hibernate depending on the weather; in warmer climates they may not hibernate at all. The Eurasian brown bear became extinct in England around 1,000 years ago, so you will not see any in our woods... if you do, please let the ranger know!

