hooks marsh is in the heart of river lee country park. this ‘park within a park’ covers a thousand acres of former gravel pits, now transformed into a haven for wildlife and people.

look to the east and get a glimpse of some of the 21 listed buildings which made up the former royal gunpowder mills. this extensive site saw over 300 years of continuous service, making and testing explosives.

you are now walking along waltons walk with the river lee flood relief channel (horsemill stream) and the weir to the east. this computer controlled weir has radial gates which allow for the rapid escape of flood water from further up the lea valley. the channel prevents towns such as waltham abbey and cheshunt from flooding.

opposite the weir you can see the expanse of hall marsh scrape and its bird hides. this area of shallow water is a man-made wildlife refuge, which mimics the conditions of a river flood meadow. in spring, little ringed plovers arrive from africa to breed and raise their chicks on the shingle beaches. during the autumn, redshanks and lapwings feed in the wet mud. you can also see a small concrete gun emplacement used during world war ii. it has been successfully adapted to create a hibernaculum/bat house.

hooks marsh ditch is a premier dragonfly location and in 1993 the hairy dragonfly was first seen here. it is the rarest breeding species in the lea valley.

an otter holt (log pile) has been built on this tiny island to encourage otters which were re-introduced into the park in 1991. always elusive, they are seen occasionally in this area and you might be lucky enough to spot one!

this is the best place in london to see early marsh orchids. in early june, warm sunlight penetrates a canopy of silver birch trees, dappling light onto a spectacular pink carpet fashioned by more than 10,000 orchids, on an area the size of a football pitch. these delicate flowers are one of only a few plants able to thrive in the nutrient poor soil, created with waste ash from coal-fired power stations.
On this circular walk through the heart of River Lee Country Park - the ‘Park within a Park’, you will see a former World War II gun emplacement, the mysterious buildings which made up the former Gunpowder Factory, Nightingale Wood, the best place to see Early Marsh Orchids in the London Region in June, and two very different weirs. You might also see Kingfishers, dragonflies, the very rare and secretive Bittern, Long-eared Owls, and the rarest native hardwood tree. Start at whichever point is most convenient to you. There are picnic tables, a tea-room at Hayes Hill Farm and toilets near the Bittern Watchpoint.

**How to get to the Walk**

Cheshunt is the nearest railway station. The bus stops opposite Turnford Brook, Cheshunt.

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