



How to see more

wildlife



How to see more wildlife

Some top tips

The best time to watch wildlife is dawn and dusk and weather dependent – avoid the wind and rain! Timing your visit is crucial, not all plants and animals can be seen all year round but each season has its highlights. The 'Nature's Calendar' leaflets give an idea of what can be seen each month and season. Visit places where wildlife is used to people: nature reserves and country parks etc. When visiting coastal areas and estuaries, always check the tide times, for both your own safety and for optimum wildlife watching.



The survival instinct of wild animals is great so they will tend to keep out of your way. Simply keeping very still and quiet in one place is a really good start to watching wildlife. Birds and insects are most easily seen if approached slowly and quietly. Mammals are a little

more difficult as they have acute hearing and sense of smell. The car can act as a good hide. However if on foot, wear neutral coloured clothing (that doesn't rustle) and walking boots. Sit down and wait for the wildlife to come to you - it will soon get used to your presence. Lean against a wall or tree, as this hides your outline but also is more comfortable allowing you to sit for longer. Always try sitting down wind of what you want to observe.

Detective work can unearth plenty of clues to what wildlife is around – look out for tracks in the mud and soft ground, pellets, feathers, nests and fur caught on barbed wire. Use a good 'Tracks and Signs' book to help with identification along with pocket guides on birds, flowers and mammals etc. Books or charts such as the Collins and FSC field guides are very useful. Binoculars will help with getting better views of wildlife from a greater distance.

Choosing binoculars can be difficult as the choice is massive, ideally 8 x 40 (8 refers to the magnification and 40 to the size of lens and light capture). The higher the magnification, the harder they are to use, a steady hand is needed! And bear in mind small lenses do not work well in low light. As for cost – you get what you pay for so pay as much as you can afford!



Tips on birdwatching

Spring is the best time to appreciate the birdlife as they are busy attracting a mate and building nests. Just get up early and relish the cacophony of the dawn chorus. Try choosing a semi-wooded area as the diversity of bird song will be greater. Listen out for the chiffchaff (this is an easy one as it sings its name), the willow warbler with its descending call, great tit who calls 'teacher teacher' to name but a few.



In grasslands, listen and look for the skylark and meadow pipits and watch them drop out of the sky like parachutes down to the ground after they have finished calling.

Estuaries and wetlands in winter are the best time to see waders and wildfowl, make sure that you check the tides times for low tide.

Binoculars or a telescope are a must if you want to get really good views of birds.



Reptiles

Reptiles hibernate through the winter so are only seen from April to October. Early morning is best as they are warming up in the sun before they get going for the day. Sunny open patches and large stones are the best place for basking reptiles. Lizards like stone walls as well as logs. Slow-worms can often be found under rocks, compost heaps and old carpet or corrugated iron! Grass snakes like water and wet areas and adders are common in grassy areas, they are venomous but also very shy so do not go too close!



Insects

The combination of flowers and sun are a good start to seeing plenty of insect life – beetles, bees, butterflies and hoverflies. All insects enjoy basking in the sun and many need nectar to drink. Butterflies are attracted to purple and pink flowers where as bees prefer yellow (gorse is a good one).



Mammals

A top tip for mammal watching is to look for tracks in mud, soft sand or snow. Badgers, otters, stoat, weasel and mink all have a 5 toed-print with claws, where as dogs only have 4 toes. Look out for deer slots, which are similar to sheep prints, though if there are no sheep around they could be deer. Another tell-tale sign of deer are marks on tree bark where they scratch their horns. The brave could look for droppings. Each mammal species has distinctive



terms of colour, shape and even smell! Barbed wire fences often catch hair/fur on them, especially above distinctive paths in hedgerows: badger fur is grey with a black tip at the end, where as deer fur is a uniform colour.

Feeding signs are a good clue to what is around – mice, voles and squirrels all eat nuts and seeds in a specific way,

hazel nuts best indicate the different characteristics. A pile of feathers gives a clue as to what has had a meal. Foxes chew the ends of feathers whereas a bird of prey will pluck them out.

Photos by Jon Morris, David Hackford, Clare Morris and Jayne Morris.

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