

BBC

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COUNTRYFILE

ISSUE 176 | MAY 2021 | £4.75

Magnificent meadows

Lazy days among butterflies and wildflowers

NATURE WRITING COMPETITION
Share your wild words, p38



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Out and about

There's nothing like your beloved dog to help you make the most of the great outdoors – something Great British Dogs, sponsored by Winalot®, knows only too well

Having spent so much of the last year in our homes, it's never been more important to stay active. And if ever you struggle for the motivation needed to get your boots on for a long walk, there's nothing like the infectious enthusiasm of your dog to get you on your feet.

This is something Team GB Paralympian and Great British Dogs ambassador Lauren Steadman has loved about hers and her sister's German

shepherds, Meric Belle and Robin: "We're an active family, and these dogs can walk up to eight miles, so it's great to find a woodland walk and get away from it all. Our dogs just make everything special."

And the Great British Dogs website, sponsored by Winalot®, is full of thousands of inspiring stories. Whether people have been laid low by medical problems or have struggled with the huge changes we've all experienced recently, our dogs have helped us get back out there.

If you've got a four-legged friend who's kept you active and helped you stay positive during this challenging time, send their story to Great British Dogs for the chance to win incredible dog-themed prizes, including a personalised hamper and some Winalot® pouches!



Tell us about your Great British Dog at GreatBritishDogs.co.uk



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MEET SOME OUTDOOR EXPLORERS

Your dog could be featured here next time



Teddy

"Watching him bound around and explore with such energy and relentless enthusiasm just makes me so happy. He's always so determined to catch a bird, but hasn't yet grasped the fact that he can't fly!"

– Stuart, South West England



Alfie

"He loves nothing more than spending time outdoors, so we spend hours exploring forests and nature trails together. He also enjoys snuggling and snoozing, and most evenings you can find him curled up on my daughter's bed."

– Debra, North East England

Share your dog story for the chance to feature on the website – and to win some amazing dog-themed prizes!





Celebrate the volunteers who cared for our national parks, such as the Lake District, over the past year on page 68

Honouring park heroes



“Earlier this spring, I helped judge the Campaign for National Parks Park Protector Awards. They were very difficult awards to judge. The idea is to celebrate volunteers who have helped keep our national parks in fine fettle for wildlife, residents, visitors and even virtual visitors. And what a job they’ve had over the past 12 months.

With easing of lockdowns and foreign holidays largely impossible, millions more people flocked to the countryside. Sadly, some of them didn’t behave well and littering and antisocial behaviour became a huge problem. But many groups of volunteers took on the challenge and often were able to fix the issues, clear the litter and persuade people to make better choices. In Dovedale alone, volunteers picked 1,000 bags of litter over the summer. Others worked tirelessly to bring the national park experience to those who were isolating and could not visit. I’m sure you’d like to join me and my team in offering all these heroes our thanks (page 68).

Such generous actions always fill me with hope, as does the realisation that the people causing problems are a tiny minority. I truly expect that as more people experience the health-giving joys of the countryside, they will realise that everyone needs to nurture and respect it – and the people who live there.

Fergus

Fergus Collins, editor@countryfile.com



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THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



Hamza Yassin, page 18

“Thrust out into the Atlantic Ocean, the Ardnamurchan Peninsula has some of the richest habitat and most diverse wildlife in the whole of Britain.”



Jane Adams, page 52

“I’m not alone in the pursuit of scent. Fresh out of hibernation, queen bumblebees crawl drunkenly from flower to flower, intoxicated.”



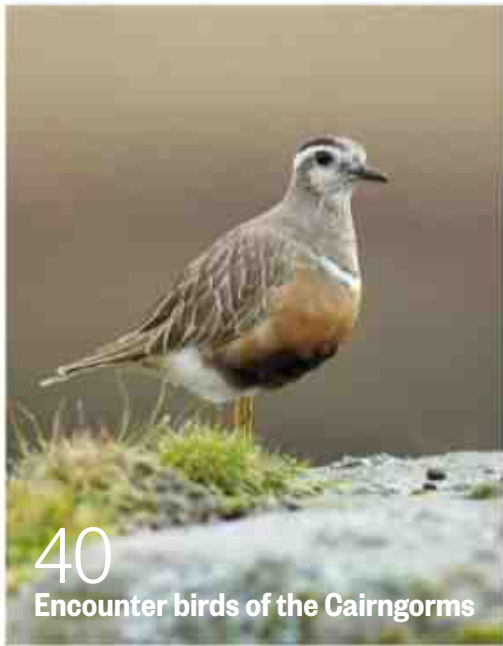
Ellie Harrison, page 114

“The list will be unique to everyone, but these are just a handful of the experiences I am booking in for when lockdown eases...”

Contents



11 Savour bountiful broad beans



40 Encounter birds of the Cairngorms



18 Discover Scotland's spectacular wild west coast



32 Wonder at the elegance of the shivering aspen

MONTH IN THE COUNTRY

6-13 MAY IN THE COUNTRY

- › How to make herb-infused oil.
- › Four books with flower power.
- › Celebrate Dawn Chorus Day.

13 IDENTIFY SPRING SEABIRDS

Coastal birds to spot this season.

14 ON THE FARM WITH ADAM

Celebrating my father's legacy and the 50th birthday of Cotswold Farm Park.



ON YOUR COVER

A colourful carpet of spring wildflowers stretches down towards the cove at Porth Joke, West Pentire, Cornwall.

FEATURES

18 SCOTLAND'S WILD WEST

On the cover

After relocating to Scotland's remote Ardnamurchan Peninsula, Hamza Yassin urges us all to experience the beauty and spectacular wildlife of this dramatic coastline.

32 THE QUAKING ASPEN

Slender and graceful, this shivering beauty was sacred to our ancestors but is now seldom noticed. Lisa Schneidau reveals the world of the aspen, our forgotten tree.

40 SPRING ON THE CAIRNGORMS PLATEAUX

On the cover

When spring sunshine melts most of the snow, the rugged Cairngorms upland bursts into life, with rare wildflowers, cold-loving birds and hardy mammals.

52 SCENTS OF CALM

On the cover

You can smell spring's arrival on the air, but why does nature create this fragrant symphony? Jane Adams explores the science of wild scents.

56 GREAT SCOTT

On the cover

Frank Gardner profiles Sir Peter Scott, founder of Slimbridge Wetland Centre and one of our greatest conservationists.

62 LOVE IN LAKELAND

On the cover

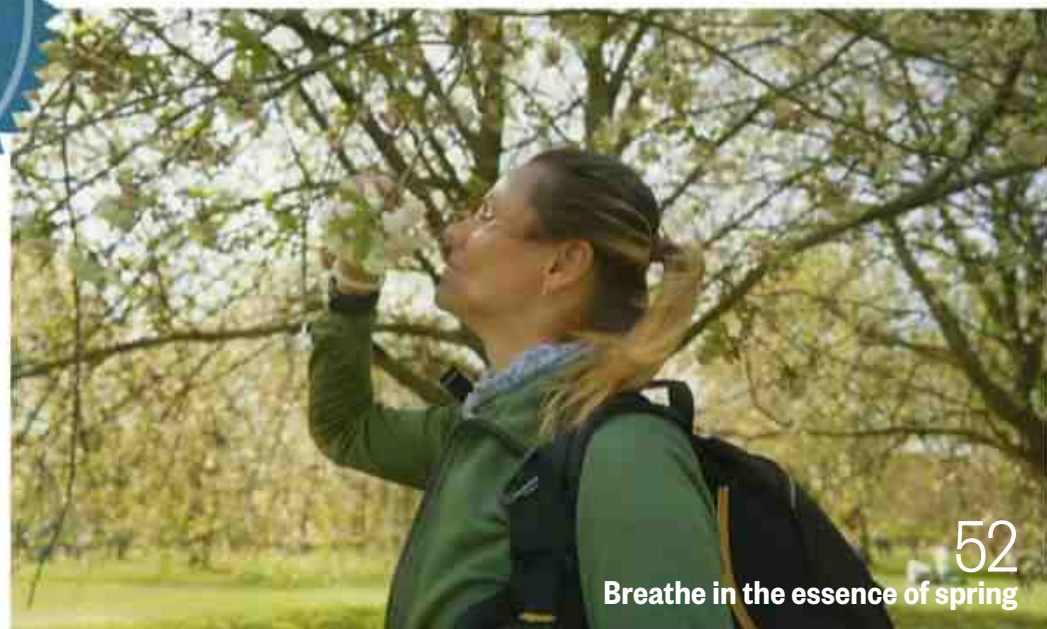
Moving new film *Supernova*, starring Colin Firth and Stanley Tucci, puts the Lake District landscapes at centre stage.

68 NATIONAL PARK HEROES

This year's Park Protector Awards celebrate those safeguarding our national parks. We reveal the winners.

**subscribe
today**

and save with our
special offer,
page 30



52
Breathe in the essence of spring



56
Great naturalist Sir Peter Scott



77
Wander in magnificent meadows

REGULARS

16 COUNTRY VIEWS

Untrained dogs are a danger and the owner is responsible, says Sara Maitland.

30 SUBSCRIBE NOW!

A special offer for new subscribers.

38 CALLING NEW WRITERS

Are you a budding nature writer? Enter our competition for a chance to see your work published in the magazine.

On the cover

49 JOHN CRAVEN

Increased investment in rural areas is an urgent need, say leading campaigners.

50 BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Should the plan to license grouse shooting in Scotland go ahead? We look at both sides of the argument.

On the cover

94 BOOKS, RADIO AND TV

What to read and watch, plus a Q&A with nature writer Paul Evans.

98 YOUR LETTERS

Have your say on rural issues.

100 BACKPACKS ON TEST

We test 30–40L trekking backpacks.

104 QUIZ & CROSSWORD

Test your countryside knowledge.

113 NEXT MONTH

What's coming up in our walking special.

114 ELLIE HARRISON

Online calls have been a lockdown saviour, but I've missed real interactions. These are the experiences I'm booking in.

Great days out

MEADOW WALKS

On the cover

78 Monarch of meadows
Kingcombe Meadows, Dorset

82 Hebridean machair
South Uist, Outer Hebrides

84 Down dreamland
Whitehill Down, Carmarthenshire

85 Technicoloured hollows
Hills and Holes, Cambridgeshire

86 Flowers and fells
Littondale, North Yorkshire

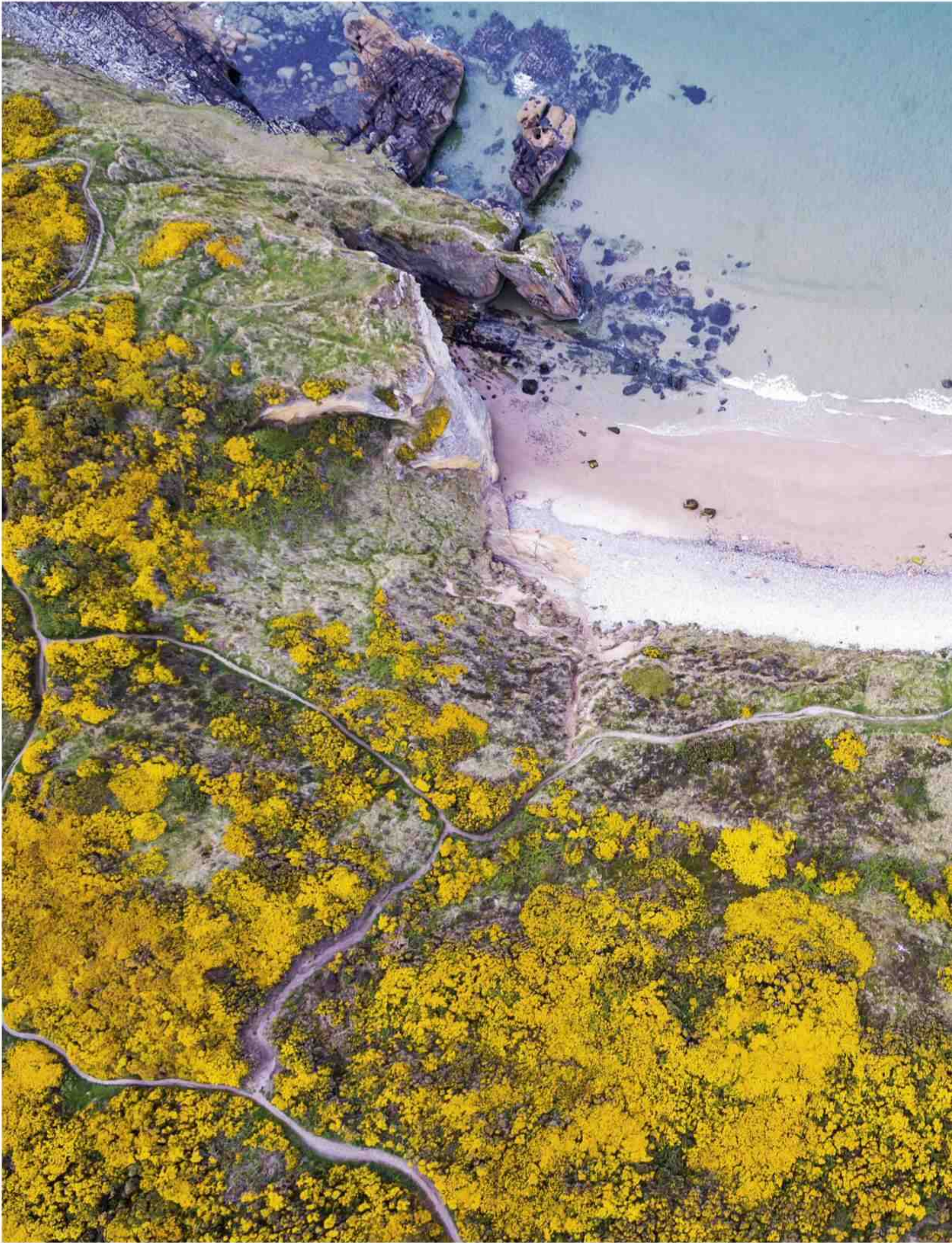
88 Paradise hills
Pentwyn Farm, Monmouthshire

89 Snakes in the grass
Magdalen College, Oxfordshire

89 Pennine pastures
Weardale, County Durham

90 Castle in colour
Hever Castle, Kent

92 Meadow campsites
Top seven, nationwide





MAY IN THE COUNTRY

PICTURES > WILDLIFE > PEOPLE & PLACES > COUNTRY KNOW-HOW > FOOD

VISION OF BEAUTY

At first, our eyes wonder if we are looking at a close-up image of yellow and green lichen growing on a boulder beside a rockpool, before realising this is, in fact, a bird's-eye view of the coast. In May, Clashach Cove on the Moray Coastal Trail, north-east Scotland, is surrounded by flowering gorse, covering the sandstone cliffs in yellow. Sitting within a sheltered bowl, the beach provides a great spot for a picnic.



ART OF THE LAND

A gardener mows the grass on the horticultural installation *Cells of Life* at Jupiter Artland sculpture park in the grounds of Bonnington House near Edinburgh. Created by Charles Jencks in 2010 and comprising eight land formations and four lakes, the artwork represents the process of mitosis, in which a cell divides into two.

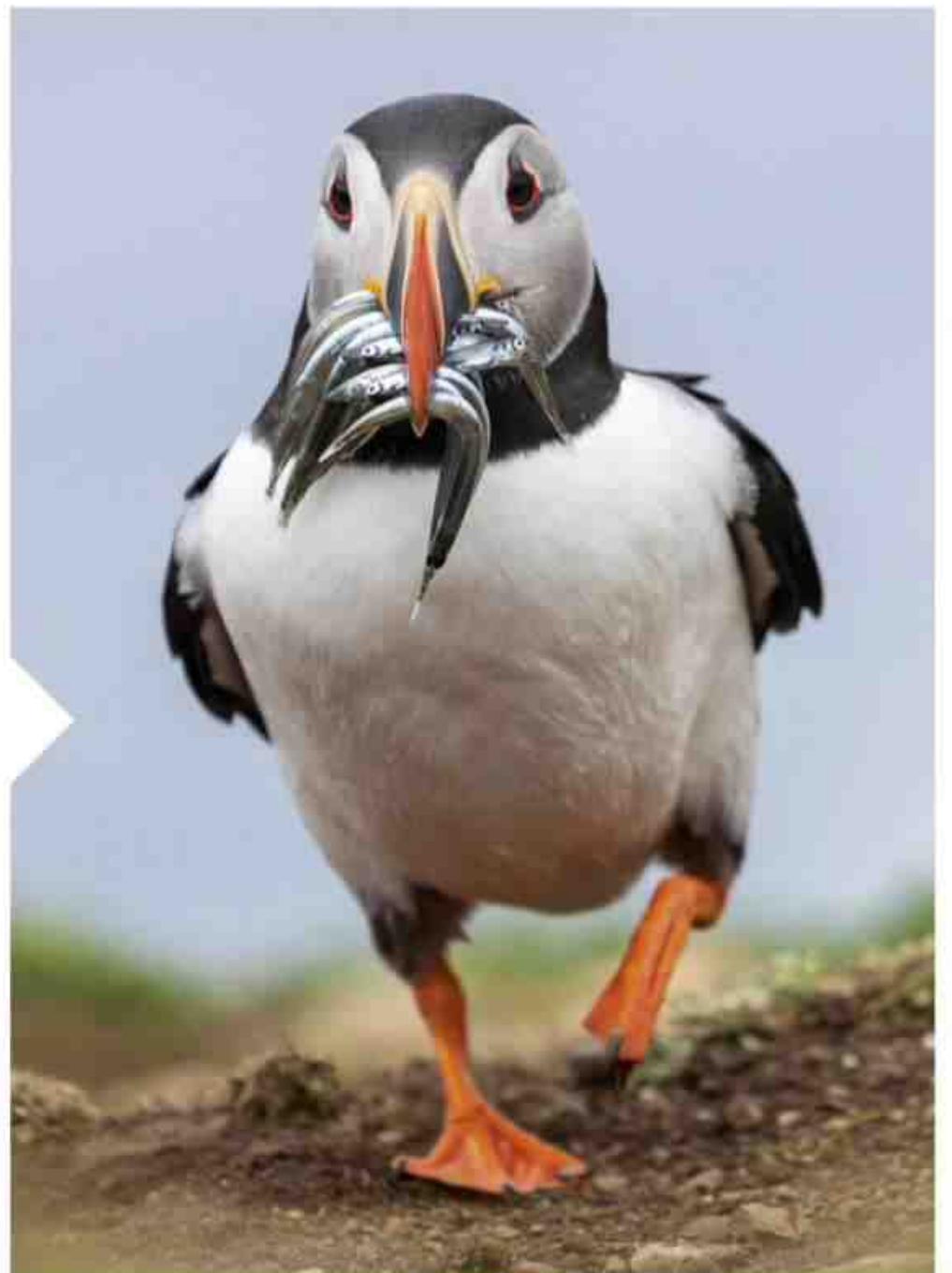


SPIDER SENSE

A female flower crab spider (*Misumena vatia*) lives up to its name by sitting on a saxifraga bloom. Rather than spinning webs, this spider lies in wait to ambush insect prey that lands to feed on flowers. Although the species often appears white, the female can alter the colour of its body to match its surroundings, unlike the smaller male.

PECKISH PUFFIN

In a rush to feed its pufflings, an adult Atlantic puffin (*Fratercula arctica*) races back to its burrow with a beak full of its favourite fare – sand eels – on Skomer Island in Pembrokeshire. This colourful aquatic bird is capable of diving up to 60 metres underwater to fish, and uses its rough tongue and serrated beak to hold its catch.





CROWNING GLORY

This lovely image of a May spring day on Eype Down near Bridport, Dorset has a painterly beauty. The striking layers of colour – with bright bluebells at the base, moving into brilliant green woodland before white mist envelops tree-topped Colmer's Hill beneath a hazy sky – create a spectacular scene.

A conical sandstone mound, Colmer's Hill rises 127 metres and is crowned by a stand of Scot's pines planted during the First World War.

Wildlife comeback

CRANE POPULATION HITS RECORD HIGH

According to the latest RSPB survey, Britain's common crane population continues to make a comeback after a record 64 pairs were found to have bred in 2020, seeing the total population rise from 180 birds in 2018 to more than 200.

At 1.2m, the common crane is Britain's tallest bird and is known for its elaborate courtship dances. Once common here, these stately members of the *Gruidae* family became extinct in the UK around 400 years ago as a result of hunting and the decline of wetland habitats.

Since a small number of wild cranes returned to Norfolk in 1979, conservation work has been ongoing to restore peatlands and wetlands, which, alongside a reintroduction programme, has seen the population steadily grow.

Stephen Prowse from the National Trust says: "Careful protection has allowed the cranes to spread to surrounding counties, with a significant breeding population now located in the Broads. With a focus towards more habitat creation in the future, we hope to see the fortunes of these birds continue to improve."



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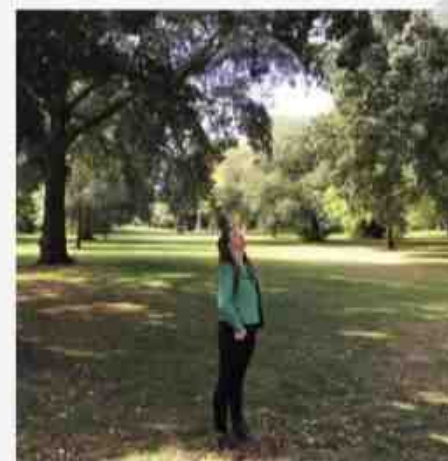
May is a glorious month to be out exploring the British countryside, and there's no better place to begin your next adventure than *BBC Countryfile Magazine's* website: countryfile.com. Learn how to identify edible leaves and flowers with our guide to foraging in May, discover the perfect picnic ideas with our favourite spring recipes, and experience floral paradise as we reveal the best country gardens to visit in the UK. And for tranquil escapism, find all our wandering plodcasts at countryfile.com/podcast.

1 MAY-19 SEPTEMBER 2021

Secret World of Plants at Kew Gardens

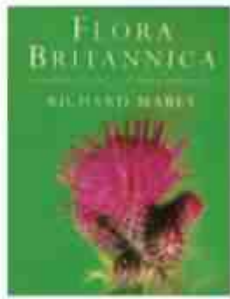
Explore the veiled secrets of the plant world through immersive experiences and unique art installations across Kew Gardens in London. The summer series includes large-scale works by acclaimed artist Vaughn Bell, as well as 'tree listening' and the hidden music of plants.

kew.org/kew-gardens/whats-on/secret-world-of-plants



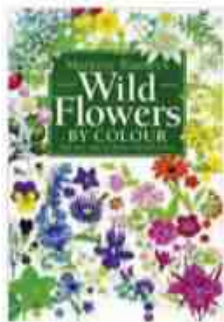
Photos Getty

FROM THE BOOKSHELF:

FLOWER POWER*Four books to bring colour to your day***FLORA BRITANNICA**

by Richard Mabey

A magisterial collection of tales, anecdotes, folklore and natural history of Britain's trees, shrubs, herbs and wildflowers. Endlessly absorbing and enriching.

**WILD FLOWERS BY COLOUR**

by Marjorie Blamey

There are many brilliant ID guides out there, but these beautiful illustrations give vicarious pleasure when you can't get outside yourself.

**MEADOWLAND**

by John Lewis-Stempel

How restoring an intensively farmed pasture to a wildflower meadow saw a return of incredible wildlife riches – and brought joy to the author.

**THE MILITARY ORCHID**

by Jocelyn Brooke

A poignant, acerbic and funny memoir of the first half of the 20th century set against a 30-year quest to find an elusive orchid.

**THE SEASONAL TABLE: A TASTE OF MAY***Join Kathy Bishop and Tom Crowford on their West Country smallholding*

May is a wonderful time of new life and green growth. Blue tits are nesting in the old apple tree, clouds of cow parsley decorate the hedgerows, a bird box offers shelter to a tree bumblebee colony and fox cubs are gambolling about the gooseberry patch, much to the disgruntlement of our geese. The warmer weather means it's time for the sheep to be sheared, the bees to be checked for signs of swarming and the vegetable patch to rocket into production. Right now, it's broad beans a gogo!

BROAD BEAN, POTATO AND RADISH SALAD WITH GARDEN HERBSINGREDIENTS *Serves 4*

300g podded broad beans
500g new potatoes, scrubbed
Small handful of garden mint leaves, chopped
Small bunch of radishes, sliced
A few fronds of dill
Small handful of pea shoots (optional)
Small handful of borage flowers (optional)
Freshly ground black pepper

For the dressing

1 tbsp Dijon mustard
1 tbsp apple cider vinegar
1 tsp sugar
6 tbsp sunflower oil

METHOD

1. Bring a large pan of salted water to the boil and cook the broad beans for a few minutes until tender. Remove them with a slotted spoon and set aside in a bowl. Add the potatoes to the pan of water and boil

for 20 minutes or until cooked through, then drain and steam dry.

2. While the potatoes are cooking, pop any large broad beans out of their jackets while they are still warm, but leave the smaller beans intact. Then make the dressing by whisking the mustard, vinegar, sugar and sunflower oil together until emulsified.

3. To assemble the salad, put the potatoes on to a large serving dish in a single layer, cutting big spuds in half as you do so. Sprinkle over the mint leaves and beans, and tumble everything together. Then roughly dollop over the dressing with a spoon. Tuck the radish slices (skin-side up) among the potatoes and tear over the dill. Scatter the pea shoots and borage flowers over the top (if using), and finish with a generous amount of freshly ground black pepper.

Discover more recipe ideas from Kathy and Tom on Instagram [instagram.com/the_seasonal_table](https://www.instagram.com/the_seasonal_table) and their website [theseasonaltable.co.uk](https://www.theseasonaltable.co.uk)

2 MAY 2021

INTERNATIONAL DAWN CHORUS DAY

On the first Sunday of May every year, bird lovers worldwide rise early and make for their favourite nature spots to celebrate International Dawn Chorus Day. The symphony alone is fulfilling enough, but have you ever wondered which song belongs to which bird? Most of us can identify the coo of a wood pigeon, but what about the loud, varied call of the wren, ending in a machine-gun trill, or the short, laid-back melody of the robin? Fear not, the RSPB is here to help with its birdsong identifier, which includes an ID playlist of the most common species that you're likely to find in your garden or local area. rspb.org.uk



Wise buy

SPROUT PENCILS

What do you do with your old pencil stubs when they get too small to use? Why not plant them? That's Sprout World's philosophy, at least. Its clever pencil designs mean you can flip them over once you're done, drop the seed-filled base into moist soil and wait for your basil, daisies or carnations to grow. A handy plant label at the end of each pencil helps you keep tabs on what's growing, so all you have to do is pop your pots on a sunny windowsill, water and wait. Buy a pack of five 100%-biodegradable pencils from £9. sproutworld.com

HOW TO MAKE...

HERB-INFUSED OIL

This simple recipe preserves the subtle aromas of garden herbs in oil, which can then be used to add flavour to spring salads and BBQs

You will need: A clean, dry Kilner jar (or any glass jar without a metal lid) • Two or three big handfuls of fresh herbs (thyme, rosemary, oregano etc.)

• Olive oil or another oil of your choice • Muslin cloth (or fine sieve) • Measuring jug • Glass bottles or jars for storage



1 Pick your herbs and put them on a sunny windowsill for a day or two to wilt. This reduces the water content of the herbs, which stops the oil going rancid.



2 Place the herbs in a clean, dry Kilner jar, leaving two inches of open space at the top. Pour in the oil to cover the herbs. Close the lid and shake well.



3 Place the Kilner jar on a warm, sunny windowsill. Leave the herbs to infuse the oil for three or four weeks, shaking the jar once or twice a day.



4 Use the muslin cloth or a fine sieve to strain out the plant material, allowing the oil to drip into a measuring jug, or something similar.



5 Pour the infused oil into clean glass bottles or jars, label and date them, then store in a cool, dark place. The oil should keep for up to a year.

ID GUIDE: **SPRING AND SUMMER SEABIRDS**

Anyone visiting a coastal nature reserve in summer will be familiar with puffins and gannets, but there are many more species to look out for along our rocky shores. Here are nine to spot in 2021



GUILLEMOT

Dapper dark-chocolate-brown and white plumage, this is the most numerous inhabitant of seabird cities, nesting on the tightest ledges. Britain has almost one million breeding pairs.



RAZORBILL

Similar to the guillemot but with blacker plumage, the razorbill has a heavier beak with a thin white stripe. It is found in more northerly regions and nests in crevices among rocks at the base of cliffs.



KITTIWAKE

This delicate gull with snow-white plumage and grey upper wings with black tips is rarely seen inland, and instead nests on ledges all around the UK. Unlike many of its relatives, it has a soft cry of a call.



GREAT SKUA

Pirates of the summer skies, the skua dive-bombs smaller birds to steal their fish catches as well as raiding nests for eggs and young. It varies in colour from pale to dark brown.



BLACK GUILLEMOT

An elegant little bird with bright red feet and white wing bars on an otherwise totally black body. Unlike its cousins' seabird cities, it nests singly or in groups on rocky coasts, sometimes on harbour walls.



GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL

Our largest gull has a 'haughty' look to its eye. Its plumage is much darker than the lesser black-backed gull and it is a more formidable predator, able to take adult seabirds and swallow them whole.



LITTLE TERN

Far scarcer than its common and Arctic cousins, the little tern has a yellow bill rather than red. It nests in small scattered colonies on shingle and sandbars and is easily disturbed by dogs off leads.



SHAG

This smaller, blacker, more seagoing relative of the cormorant has an emerald eye and a greenish sheen to its plumage. It nests among the colonies of other seabirds.



FULMAR

Britain's albatross, this stiff-winged glider soars on the updraft of cliffs. Superficially resembling a gull, it nests in colonies on cliffs. If attacked, it can shoot a foul, oily substance from its bill.



150 YEARS OF BANK HOLIDAYS

On 26 May 1871 Parliament passed the Bank Holidays Act, creating four annual bank holidays (five in Scotland). On 29 May 1871, the first bank holiday was held on Whit Monday. This year's May bank holidays fall on 3 and 31 May.



Log your logpile

Ever wondered which bugs and beetles make their homes in logpiles? Find out how to create the ideal wooded home for stag beetles (above) – a species in decline across Europe – and other invertebrates, then record your finds online as part of the People's Trust for Endangered Species' Log Your Logpile survey. ptes.org

On the farm with Adam Henson



CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF COTSWOLD FARM PARK

“If you’ve seen one sheep, you’ve seen ’em all.” That’s a controversial view and one you wouldn’t expect me to agree with. And it’s certainly not what you want to hear when you’re just about to open a new tourist attraction to show your sheep off to the visiting public. Yet that’s exactly what one of my Dad’s old farming friends said to him as he was preparing to put his reputation on the line with a totally untried venture.

My father was conservationist and broadcaster Joe Henson, who is still fondly remembered for his work on TV shows including *Animal Magic* and *In The Country*, as well as his numerous appearances by my side on *Countryfile*. Fifty years ago this month, when I was just a little boy, he took a huge gamble when he unlocked the gates of our tenanted farm in the Cotswolds and invited people in to see his collection of rare and native British farm breeds.

He was fascinated by everything from Old Spots pigs and Portland sheep to Belted Galloway and Longhorn cattle, and wanted to share his enthusiasm with everybody. But more than that, he knew action was needed to protect these old county breeds and the slow-growing, multi-purpose livestock whose numbers had dwindled in the post-war rush for intensive food production.

What Dad had created was the world’s first farm park,



A young Adam holds the reins at Cotswold Farm Park, which was opened by his father Joe in 1971

something totally different from the animal attractions that were common at the time, such as pet ‘zoos’ and safari parks. But what he couldn’t possibly have known in May 1971 was that the concept would be copied, not only here but all over the world.

He loved to talk about a visit to New Zealand when he saw a sign directing motorists to a nearby farm park. His first reaction was pride at discovering that his idea had travelled around the globe, quickly followed by frustration at having not copyrighted the phrase ‘farm park’ from the beginning. Every time he told the story his face would crease into a smile and he’d start to chuckle – imitation really is the sincerest form of flattery.

It’s worth remembering that in the ’60s and ’70s, farms weren’t places to visit, and the closest most people came to agriculture was staying on a

campsite in a farmer’s field. I’m pretty sure that half a century ago, no one used the word ‘diversification’ either, but that’s precisely what Dad was doing. He jokingly called his growing collection of rare breeds his “expensive hobby” and as livestock can’t live on fresh air, he needed them to pay their way. It’s what generations of farmers who have followed his lead are doing, too.

CRUCIAL CONSERVATION WORK

The Cotswold Farm Park was the first venue to gain official recognition from the Rare Breeds Survival Trust (RBST). The original plaque bearing the words ‘Approved Centre No. 1’ still takes pride of place at the visitor entrance. We have been joined by a further 22 RBST-accredited farm parks and city farms in the UK, from Cornwall to Kincardineshire, and our vital conservation role has a renewed focus in 2021. The Farm Parks Project is spotlighting innovative breeding programmes, advances in genetics with semen and embryo donation, and exploiting the world-class pool of knowledge among experienced stockmen and women.

Exactly 50 years after welcoming our first visitors on that memorable May morning, not only are we still here but we are needed more than ever.

Ask Adam: What topic would you like to know more about? Email your suggestions to editor@countryfile.com

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Sara Maitland

Untrained dogs are a danger in the countryside – and the owner is always responsible

Illustration: Lynn Hatzius

“I grew up with dogs. Our first family dog was a small poodle called Perro. At that time we lived in London and Perro was chiefly trained by my grandfather who lived with us. Perro was so well trained that when we moved to the Scottish countryside we had to put down a fake curbstone, because he could not relieve himself without a gutter to step into.

Later, my husband gave me a dog for my wedding present – a West Highland Terrier called Haggis, who did not need a lead even in towns because he was trained not to step down from a pavement on his own but sit until I caught up with him. Now I share my home with Zoe, a small hairy terrier-type dog. She is very old these days and I love her.

I did not acquire Zoe as a puppy. She came to me because she was out of control and not manageable in a city. At first she wasn't manageable in the countryside either: she ran away, she chased anything that moved – which, up on my moor, meant sheep and cows as well as wild animals and game. However, Zoe was housetrained and never attacked anyone.

In the end, I went to the vet for advice and she said something truly useful: “This is a dog who has been loved but not trained. You can always, even when they are older, train a dog that has been loved. Dogs are pack animals – she wants to be in your pack. You just need to make



absolutely clear to her that you are the boss and what it is that you want.”

This worked. She still has a tendency to take off after hare, but she never catches one and comes in when called. And she occasionally likes to sneak off and visit the people who live near the signal box, half a mile away, who I am convinced give her snacks – though they deny it!

TRAINING IS VITAL

In the last year of coronavirus lockdowns a great number of people have acquired puppies for the first time, but are not ‘dominating’ them as a puppy needs to be dominated – both to make the dog fun to own and, I believe, to make it happy. A dog who is not under control can – and will – do an unexpected amount of damage.

For example, we talk about dogs ‘worrying’ sheep: a dog that

chases sheep is not in the human sense ‘worrying’ them – she/he is damaging them: causing them panic, distress, miscarriage and even death.

This is not only extremely upsetting for the sheep, it is also properly infuriating to their owners, who, incidentally, have the legal right to shoot your dog if it is harassing or distressing their stock.

Ground-nesting birds, most rodents and indeed more or less anything they can get their teeth into are fair game from the dog’s point of view. It is your business – not the dog’s, not the farmer’s and not the victim’s – to prevent your dog ‘worrying’ anything.

This is very simple to achieve: keep it on a lead where there are any animals around and keep it in sight at all times. Remember that your dogs will not mind being kept close to you – don’t be deceived by the tugging, that is part of the game. They are pack animals and they like being with others.

For centuries dogs have been ‘best friends’ with humans. Few humans will love you as your well-trained dog will love you, and it will give you exercise and joy. But an ill-trained dog is nerve-racking, dangerous to wildlife and may render you criminal.

It is, very simply, up to you.



Sara Maitland is a writer who lives in Dumfries and Galloway. Her works include *A Book of Silence* and *Gossip from the Forest*

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DISCOVER MY WILD HOME

Smitten by the untamed beauty of Scotland's western shores, **Hamza Yassin** upped sticks from Northampton and settled on the remote Ardnamurchan Peninsula. Now he urges us all to experience the tranquillity and spectacular wildlife of this dramatic coastline



From Sanna Bay on the Ardnamurchan Peninsula, the Small Isles of Muck, Eigg and Rum are visible across the water, all products of ferocious volcanic activity in north-west Scotland millions of years ago

Photo: Hamza Yassin



It's one of the most remote places in mainland Scotland – a vast, open, mountainous landscape surrounded by the sea on three sides. And I feel privileged to call it my home.

The Ardnarmurchan Peninsula is a two-hour drive from the nearest towns – the Highland settlements of **Oban** and **Fort William**. From the village of **Salen**, a single-track road enters the peninsula, winding for 20 miles along the shores of Sunart and swinging inland over hills and moors.

Finally, at the end of the road, lie the western shores of the peninsula, and the tiny settlements of **Kilchoan** and **Portuairk**. Standing on the shoreline – the most westerly point in mainland Britain – you can look out and see the islands of Coll and Tyree; to the north, Eigg, Muck, Rum, Canna and Skye; south, the sound of Mull and island of Mull.

I was first introduced to Ardnarmurchan 10 years ago when I arrived for a week's holiday here with a university friend. I immediately fell in love. The wildlife and the beautiful views convinced me that this was what I had been looking for, and I was determined to make this wonderful place my home. Two weeks later I was back for good, living out of my car for the first nine



TOP Ardnarmurchan's population numbers about 320, with 150 people living in Kilchoan and the rest in small, scattered villages, such as here around Sanna Bay
ABOVE The clear turquoise waters and white-shell sands of Sanna Bay look like a scene from a Caribbean island (although the water temperature may not match)

months. During the days, I took what soon became thousands of photographs, trying to fulfil my dream of making a living as a wildlife photographer and cameraman.

And the views here are certainly photogenic. In this wild landscape, there are mountains, lochs, forests, dunes and beaches – some of the best in the UK. Sanna Bay has crystal-blue water with white sand, and when the sun comes out in spring,

Photos: Picfair, Alamy, Shutterstock



it sometimes makes me think that we are in Barbados rather than the west coast of Scotland. On the sand dunes near the beach you can often hear the song of the skylark high in the sky, singing his heart out to try and attract a mate. I regularly lie on my back pointing my binoculars towards the heavens, trying to spot the faint outline of the bird as it climbs higher and higher.

The biggest two mountains near us are Ben Hiant and Ben Resipole, at 528 metres (1,732 feet) and 845 metres (2,772 feet). The geology of the peninsula is dramatic; a volcano erupted here around 55 million years ago, leaving behind a four-mile wide crater called Glendrian, just inland from the beach at Sanna Bay. From the air you can see the remains of a perfectly circular crater, with an old abandoned village slap bang in the middle of it.

These hills aren't just good to look at – they are great to explore, too. Even for a big guy

like me, the hills are relatively easy to walk, if you take it slowly. A good walking stick, pair of binoculars, lots of snacks and a pair of gaiters is all you really need to enjoy yourself. (The gaiters keep the ticks from biting.)

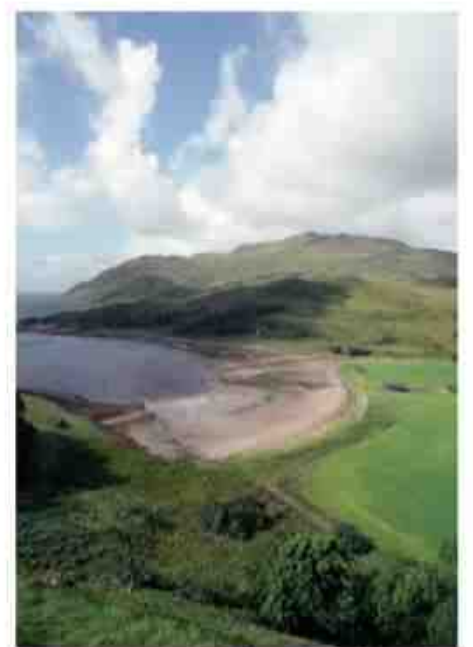
More ambitious walkers should note that only a couple of hours' drive away is Britain's largest mountain, Ben Nevis, standing at

1,345 metres (4,413ft). So this place is a great base for mountaineers, hikers and day walkers.

If you have young ones with you and don't want to venture too far up the hills, you can always go swimming and combing the beach,

looking for some of the remnants that the storms have deposited on the sand. It's possible to find some fascinating objects, such as the skeleton of the minke whale, or some cool buoys that have come off the various fishing vessels that operate in the area. They make great decorations and plant pots for your garden: recycling at its best, if you ask me.

“IN THIS WILD LANDSCAPE THERE ARE MOUNTAINS, LOCHS, FORESTS, DUNES AND BEACHES”



ABOVE The highest point on the Ardnamurchan Peninsula at 528 metres, Ben Hiant rises behind Camas nan Geall, a fertile bay area that has been occupied since Neolithic times



WILDLIFE

My house is a stone's throw from the sea, on the western edge of Ardnamurchan. Often, in early spring, I draw back the curtains and look out of my living room window in the morning, down the Sound of Mull. There, on a nearby island, a pair of white-tailed eagles often sit side by side, strengthening their bond.

I mention this because, while the views are dramatic, it is the wildlife that really made me want to live here. As a result of the large variety of terrain – all thrust out into the Atlantic Ocean – the peninsula has some of the richest habitat and most diverse wildlife in the whole of Britain. Basking sharks, orcas and dolphins patrol the waters in summertime, while white-tail eagles sail above. Wild red deer graze the hills. One of the easiest animals to spot is the Eurasian otter, simply because the single-track road that leads you into the peninsula hugs the coast and gives you the opportunity to scan the numerous bays for an encounter with the otters.

Precious remnants of ancient woodland offer further rich habitats for wildlife. The peninsula's rolling landscape includes patches of old Caledonian pine forest, and



TOP Spot the UK's largest bird of prey, the white-tailed eagle, soar above the coast as it hunts for fish
ABOVE Intelligent, adaptable and elusive, otters thrive in the clear waters of Scotland's west coast. These aquatic mammals forage in seaweed beds for fish, waterbirds and crustaceans

mature broadleaf woodland in the Sunart oakwoods. These havens are little gems, providing homes to numerous animals often not seen because they are nocturnal. They offer a safe place for some of the UK's rarest animals to thrive, including species such as the pine marten.

The holy grail for any naturalist is probably the Scottish wildcat. It's a very shy creature that I have glimpsed about three



times in my 10 years of living here. One of the best places to spot it is crossing the road during dusk and dawn.

FRESH STARTS

Every spring, I look forward to watching the sun rising higher in the sky.

Slowly, slowly the days are getting longer. At last, winter is losing its grip on the land. This is the time of the year when I bring out



TOP The bewitching ancient sessile oak woodland of the Ariundle Oakwood National Nature Reserve in Sunart is a rare example of Scottish rainforest
ABOVE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Look out for shy red deer hinds with their fawns; the secretive and agile pine marten; the Scottish wildcat is the rarest species of all

my camera and dust off the cobwebs after the long winter and get ready to start hiking the hills and surrounding beinns (mountains), looking for nest sites and subjects to film for the coming year ahead. I look forward to watching the first birds build their nests on remote cliffsides inaccessible to many predators: the ravens.

This majestic bird is sometimes associated with witchcraft, and they seem to have a bad reputation with farmers as well. But in reality, the raven is a social and intelligent bird. It was once thought that tools were used only by intelligent and complex apes, such as the chimpanzee and humans. But the raven has also been known to use sticks and twigs to achieve its ends.

In late February, you can often hear the call of the raven, a good 200m to 300m up in the air. It's unlikely to be alone, as they tend to travel in pairs or family groups. I love to watch their beautiful courtship displays with their partners – dancing, nodding and puffing up their feathers.

On Ardnamurchan, deer are a common sight. In early spring, the red deer stags are dropping their antlers, which they have sported throughout autumn and winter, and are beginning to grow new ones. They look



quite funny without their armour on top of their heads. From a distance, you could probably mistake a stag for a red deer hind. This is the perfect time of year for me to collect some of the fallen antlers that can be found scattered all over the hillside. It's amazing to think that, each year, the stags have to go through this process, and need to grow 50cm or so of bone-like antler just to use for the rutting season in early October.

A little later in spring, hinds can often be seen giving birth and trying to hide their calves in the long grass. If you sit still and

**“IF YOU DON'T
LIKE THE
WEATHER,
WAIT FIVE
MINUTES – IT
WILL CHANGE”**

have enough patience, you can enjoy glimpses of the calves with their mothers.

WEATHER WARNING

There's one more thing you need to know before you plan to visit. The weather can be all over the place. A typical spring morning might be sunny and still one minute; the next there are gale-force winds. In the afternoon you could even get snow, then clear skies once again before the sun disappears for the night. We have a saying here in the village: “If you don't like the weather, wait five minutes – it will change.”

Ardnamurchan's location, sticking out into the Atlantic, is exposed. Sometimes we get the tail-end of hurricanes that have crossed the ocean from America. When they make landfall here, these storms are capable of causing power cuts and destruction in the village. It's Mother Nature's way of showing us how powerful she is – and reminding us how insignificant we are.

So make sure you come prepared. The oldies in the village are famous for saying: “There is no such thing as bad weather – just bad clothing.” A good waterproof jacket and boots are essential. When the weather is



LIFE ON ARDNAMURCHAN

Around 150 of us live in my village full-time, with a few scattered holiday homes around the peninsula. Our community is steeped in traditional culture, language, music and sports. Older residents include many fluent Gaelic-speakers, and the young generation are taught the local tongue at school. It's a very active village, with most people having two or three jobs. Most are crofters or smallholders, such as my friend Nicky Doherty (left), but many have additional jobs such as firefighter, coastguard, or work in fish-farming or forestry.




TOP The crofting village of Portuairk, overlooking Sanna Bay, is the most westerly settlement on the British mainland
ABOVE Protruding into the Atlantic Ocean, Ardnamurchan is exposed to the raw power of the elements, as wind and waves buffet the coast

really wild, it's better to be inside than out. I can be sitting in my living room with the fire roaring looking out the window and hearing what seem to be monsters trying to smash down the window. But thankfully I know that it's just another early spring storm, and it will soon pass.

HOME SWEET HOME

At first my family thought I was going through a phase. Surely I would come back

home any day now? But 10 years on, as I live in my own house on Ardnamurchan, they think I have made the most amazing journey; they all love the fact that I live here and the whole family come up and visit as often as they can. I felt so happy and relieved once I knew that this place was going to be my forever home. It was as though a weight had been taken off my shoulders.

If you are thinking of a trip to Scotland, I highly recommend spending time here on the Ardnamurchan Peninsula. You will soon see how beautiful the area is and how easily accessible you are to the wildlife. But be warned – you might find it as hard to leave as I did, a decade ago. 



Hamza Yassin graduated from Bangor University with a degree in zoology and conservation. He is a wildlife cameraman and presenter of *Let's Go For a Walk* on CBeebies, which encourages children to explore the outdoors. He has appeared on *Countryfile* – see his report on the puffins of Lunga (available on iPlayer): [bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m000kc31/countryfile-epping-forest](https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m000kc31/countryfile-epping-forest)
Hamza's life on Ardnamurchan is the subject of his film *Scotland: My Life In the Wild* on Channel Four, available at [channel4.com/programmes/scotland-my-life-in-the-wild](https://www.channel4.com/programmes/scotland-my-life-in-the-wild)

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COVID-19

Please abide by Government advice on travel, and remain at home if recommended to do so. The information on these pages is meant to assist you once restrictions have been lifted.

NOW GO THERE

Where to eat and explore in the Ardnamurchan Peninsula, by **Hamza Yassin**



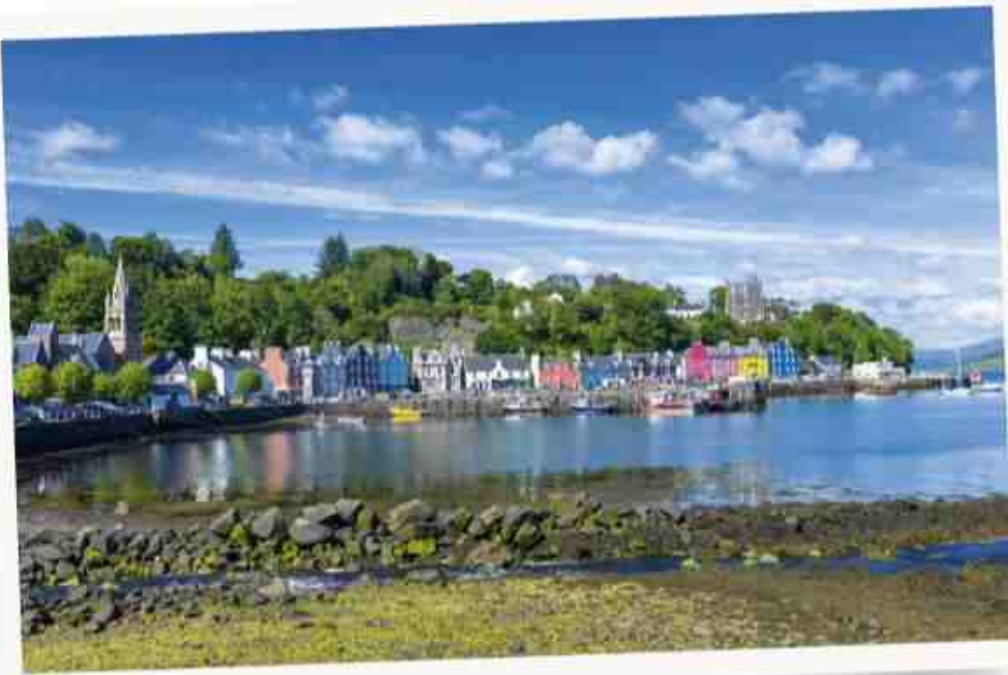
BOAT TRIPS

1 Plenty of tour companies operate boat trips in the area, but one of my favourites is **Staffa Tours**. The boat from Mull stops to pick up passengers on Kilchoan before continuing to the Isle of Lunga, part of the Treshnish Isles, around 20 miles to the southwest. En route, look for minke whales, porpoises, dolphins in the harbour and grey seals. The island is full of the most stunning and beautiful seabirds I know, including 'clowns of the sea' – puffins. You can get close to them – sit still for long enough and, believe it or not, the puffins will actually approach you as their inquisitive minds get the better of them. This allows you to take some wonderful images without disturbing the birds.

07831 885985 or 07732 912370, staffatours.com



Map: Laura Hallett/Photo Alamy



DAY TRIP: MULL

2 Being so far away from a lot of large towns and cities, I have to do my shopping on the neighbouring island of Mull, which is a short 35 to 40-minute ferry crossing to the village of **Tobermory**, made famous by the BBC children's programme *Balamory*. The Main Street is full of brightly painted restaurants, pubs, galleries and buildings. The vibrancy of the area is

wonderful – it's a must-see if you come to visit the west coast of Scotland.

And if you like your seafood, I recommend you try a small restaurant, **Café Fish**, at the end of the pier at Tobermory. They serve some of the best seafood I've ever tasted. Hopefully they will reopen shortly after lockdown is lifted. thecafefish.com

ESSENTIAL KIT

Bring a waterproof jacket and boots. The oldies in the village are famous for saying: **“There is no such thing as bad weather – just bad clothing.”**



DON'T MISS: THE NORTHERN LIGHTS

Because of the location of the Ardnamurchan Peninsula, looking out towards the north Atlantic Ocean, we have no light pollution near us, so when the aurora borealis puts on a show, you can see it clearly with your naked eye. I love getting the notification on my mobile in the middle of the night, telling me that there is a potential chance of viewing the aurora*. I quickly throw a big, thick jacket and trousers

on top of my pyjamas, grab my wellies and head out into the midnight sky with my camera looking for the dancing lights.

In spring, the aurora tends to be a bit less spectacular with the longer days – but that gives you a good excuse to return in winter. *You can download an app that will alert you when the aurora is visible – for example, *AuroraWatch UK*.

EAT

3 Ardnamurchan Natural History Visitor Centre

I would highly recommend the Natural History Centre (below) in Glenmore. The tearoom serves wonderful food (with home baking and traditional Scottish recipes), and there are great views out towards Loch Sunart. Plus the centre offers the chance to see one of the most elusive and charismatic animals, the pine marten, a family of which live in a specially built den on site. **01972 500209**, ardnamurchannaturalhistorycentre.com





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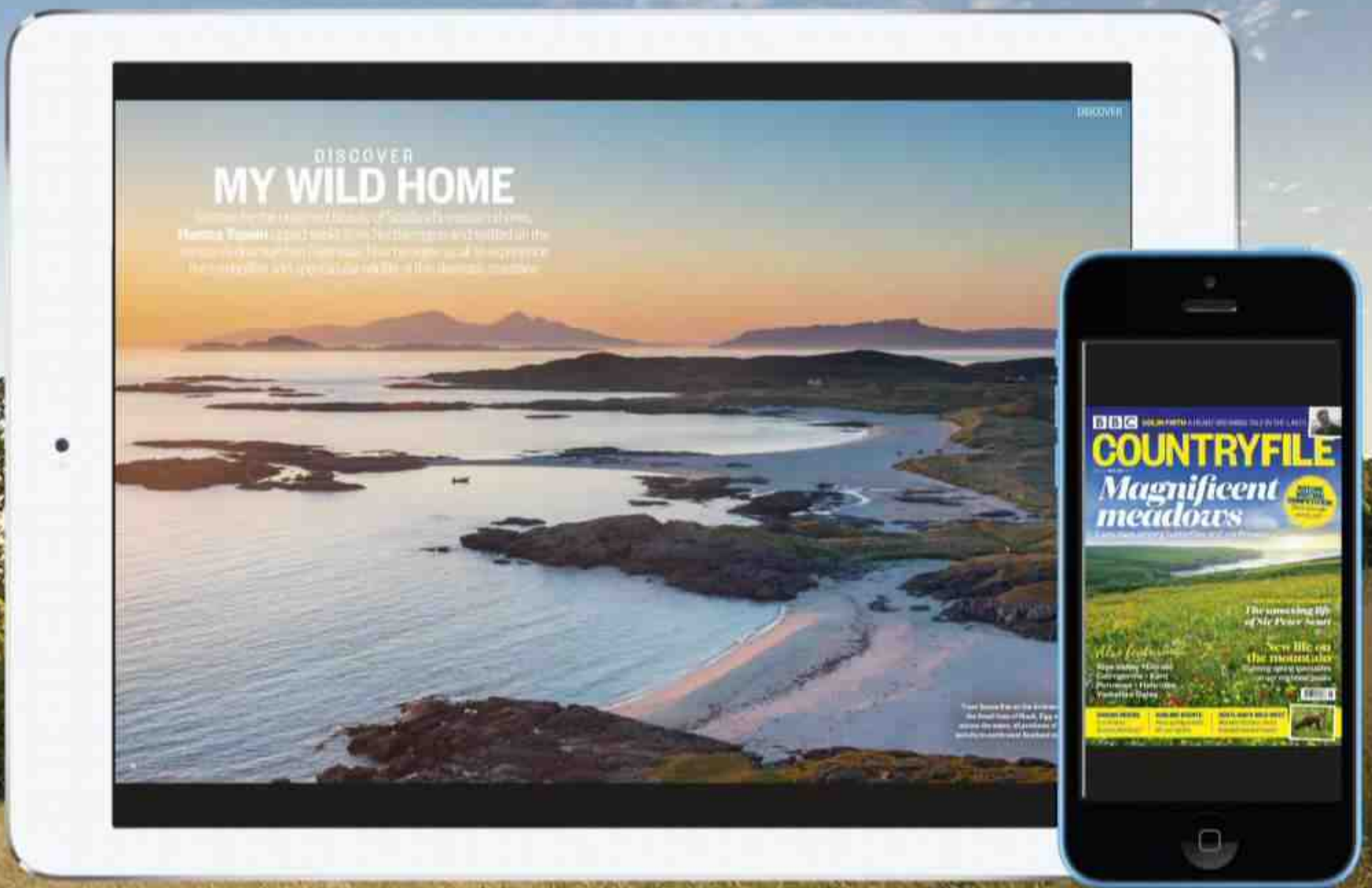
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THE SHIVERING TREE

These slender beauties have graced woodlands and heaths around the British Isles since the Ice Age. To our ancestors, they were sacred; today, passing walkers seldom notice them. **Lisa Schneidau** unveils the world of the aspen, Britain's forgotten tree

At last the familiar springtime green is returning as the trees unfurl their leaves. Wherever you are in Britain, look out for a native tree that is different to the rest. It's slender and graceful, airy and light, with pale bark. Round, wavy-edged leaves move with the slightest breeze. It's rare to be able to identify a tree by sound, rather than sight, but the distinctive, trembling, rustling leaves of the European aspen tree (*Populus tremula*) are a giveaway, lending the aspen one of its common names: the quaking tree.

While ancient oaks are celebrated and venerable yew trees grace many of our churchyards, the aspen is little known and often overlooked in Britain. Yet the aspen has much deeper roots in our landscape's history.

ROOTS AND BRANCHES

About 12,000 years ago, as Ice Age glaciers retreated, trees gradually moved north from warmer lands to colonise the British Isles. Pollen records show that our earliest trees were birch, willow – and aspen. Pine, hazel, oak and alder



A fan of full sunlight and moist, well-draining soil, the slender aspen is one of our earliest trees. Old British texts often talk of 'abele', referring to aspen and other poplars





1

followed later, and trees such as lime, elm, holly and ash, beech and hornbeam took even longer to arrive. Since that time, aspen has gradually migrated northward in our warming climate. Today it grows across Europe and Asia in cooler, temperate regions, retreating to the mountains to the south of its range. Aspen is found throughout the British Isles in woodlands and heathlands, and even on rocky coasts, but only the north and west of Scotland can boast aspen in significant numbers. In the cool Scottish autumn, the clear golden-yellow leaves of aspen trees are a natural wonder.

Aspen can tolerate a wide range of soils and climatic conditions, preferring full sunlight and well-draining, moist soils that are not waterlogged. Many other species use the aspen tree. Its leaves are a food plant for the rare dark-bordered beauty moth; the aspen hoverfly uses decaying aspen wood to lay its eggs; aspen bracket fungus depends on it.

So why is this beautiful tree so scarce? Aspen trees don't usually exceed 100 years old. Aspen is dioecious, with separate male and female trees, and they rarely flower. But that's only part of the story – the tree's mystery lies under the soil.



2

“In spite of its relative scarcity, delicate aspect and shivering leaves, aspen is a tough tree”

1 Groves of aspen trees are often ‘clones’ of one tree, all interconnected and forming part of the same organism

2 The tree’s leaves turn stunning shades of gold, yellow and red in autumn

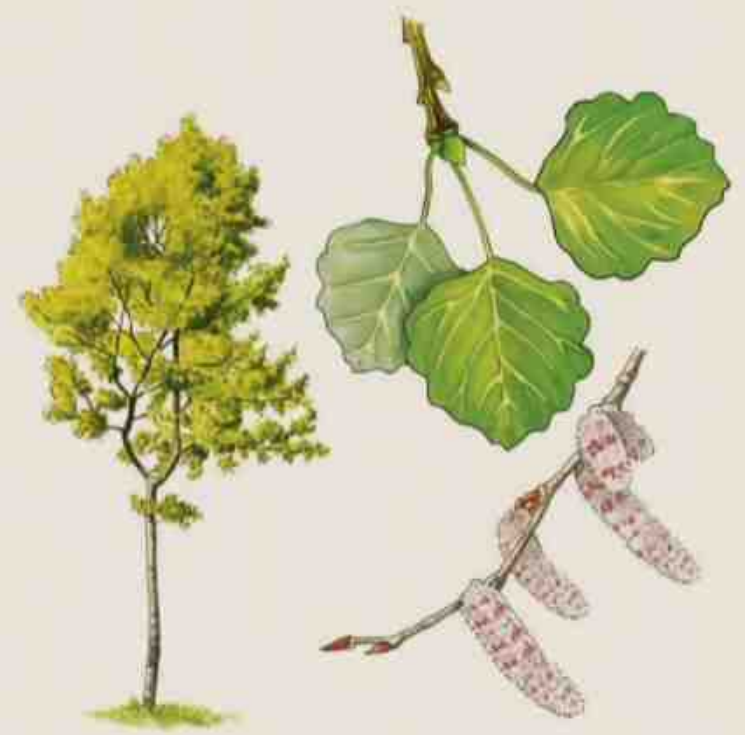
Instead of using flowers, aspen trees tend to propagate by suckering underground. The roots and suckers travel through the soil for up to 40 metres. One small tree can rapidly become a small aspen grove, forming a ‘clone’ of connected trees that are all part of the same single organism. Clones live much longer than an individual tree above ground. Studies of the



3



4



ASPEN ID GUIDE

Height: Up to 20 metres

Tree shape: Slender, spreading

Bark: Smooth, grey with horizontal lines

Leaves: Nearly round, wavy edges, a little paler on underside, trembles in any breeze, vary in size from 2.5cm to 6cm across; leaves are more heart-shaped on sucker shoots. Leaf stalks long and flattened. Leaves turn to clear yellow or red in autumn.

Catkins: Flower between February and April, look like caterpillars. Male catkins are 5–10cm long with pink-red anthers and grey silky hairs. Female catkins are 2–6cm, grey-greenish and silky.

Fruits: Fruiting catkins reach 10–12cm, ripening in May with white woolly seeds for wind dispersal.

closely related North American aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) have identified one clonal colony, called Pando, that weighs six million kilograms, covers more than 40 hectares (or 56 football pitches) and is estimated to be more than 10,000 years old; it is among the world's oldest living organisms. This incredible longevity could be why our own European aspens rarely flower – the individual clones might be too old.

In spite of its relative scarcity, delicate aspect and shivering leaves, aspen is a tough tree. Its suckering habit means it is difficult to clear aspen from an area of ground once established, and it regenerates well after fire. Damage or cutting simply doubles aspen's determination to grow. Its leaves attract nibbling cattle, sheep and deer, and it is a favourite food of the European beaver. Some ecologists are worried about the implications of beaver reintroduction for the aspen. The Trees for Life project in the Scottish Highlands has a simple solution to this gnawing problem: more aspen trees!

MEET THE FAMILY

Aspen is part of a wider family of poplar trees, and one of only two native poplars in the British Isles. The other is the uncommon black poplar



5

3 Unlike its slim, straight aspen cousin, the native black poplar has a stout, gnarled trunk and twisting, drooping branches

4 Lombardy poplars in Wrington, North Somerset. These trees reach great heights at speed but are prone to pests and diseases

5 The rare dark-bordered beauty moth; its caterpillars rely on the leaves of young aspen shoots for food

(*Populus nigra ssp. betulifolia*), a gnarled, drooping, much-loved tree that graces hedges and fields across lowland England and Wales with its distinctive red catkins.

Several other poplar species are naturalised and widespread in the British Isles. The hybrid black poplar (*Populus canadensis*) is often planted on roadsides. The white poplar (*Populus alba*) was probably introduced from southern Europe in medieval times; together with the grey poplar (*Populus canescens*), it is used in landscaping. The pointed, controversial Lombardy poplar (*Populus nigra subsp. italica*) was introduced from northern Italy in 1758.

THE SACRED TREE

Poplars were sacred to many early people. Golden crowns of poplar leaves have been found in burial mounds in Mesopotamia dated to 3,000BC. In Roman mythology, Hercules bound his head with poplar leaves after battle, to show he could walk between the worlds of the dead and the living.

Similar themes occurred in ancient Ireland. The magical Ulster hero Cuchulain carried a shield of aspen that protected him from

CATKIN ID GUIDE

Catkins are male or female flower clusters on certain broadleaved trees. Catkin shapes and flowering times vary widely between tree species. Pollen is transferred from male to female flowers by the wind or by insects, setting the seed or nut. The seed develops within female catkins, holding the seeds until ripe and aiding dispersal.



Aspen: Occasional in heathland and woodland. Flowers February–April. Male catkins are pink-red with grey down-like hairy caterpillars; female catkins are greenish-grey. Fruiting catkins in May are white and woolly.



Black poplar: An uncommon species found in wet woods and hedges. Flowers in March. Male catkins have dark red anthers; female catkins are larger, green and stubby. Fruiting catkins in June are white and woolly.



Goat willow: A broad-leaved willow common on wet soils. Flowers March–April. Male catkins are stubby with yellow pollen ('pussy willow'); female catkins are longer, green. Fruiting catkins release fluffy seeds in June.



Silver birch: This frequent, graceful tree flowers April–May. Male catkins are long, drooping and yellow-brown; female catkins are smaller and pale green. The seeds are released in autumn.



Alder: Common by rivers and in wet woodland. Flowers February–March. Male catkins are long, purple at first, greener when ripe. Female flowers branching, club-shaped. Small dark alder 'cones' release seeds in autumn.



Hazel: Common shrub in woods and hedges. Flowers Feb–March. Pale yellow, long male catkins are like lamb's tails. Female flowers are tiny, red, protruding from twig buds that become hazelnuts in autumn.



Hornbeam: Common in south and east England. Flowers April–May. Drooping male catkins are green with open bracts; female catkins have longer bracts, with winged fruits released in autumn.

fear (for more on aspen's use in shields, see box below). For the Celts, aspen was a 'stick of woe' – a sign that the otherworld was near. Stories of the Fianna, the mythical Irish band of warriors, tell of Oscar son of Oisín near death and trembling "like leaves in a strong wind, or like an aspen tree that is falling". In pre-Christian Ireland, aspen wands were buried with heroes as a reminder that death was not the end for the soul.

ASPEN IN BATTLE AND BOATS

Aspen wood is lightweight, pale and strong. The word 'aspen' comes from the Greek 'aspis', meaning shield, and the wood was traditionally used in the British Isles to make shields, oars and paddles. Twigs and branches of aspen wood were used for arrow shafts in medieval times; ecologist Oliver Rackham

refers to an English statute from 1416 forbidding clogs to be made of aspen, in order to prevent competition with the makers of arrow-shafts.

The buds, leaves and bark of aspen contain salicin (similar to aspirin) and are used in herbal medicine to help with digestive issues, headaches, pains, fevers and trembling.

Christianity also linked aspen with death: the tree's wood was said to have made Christ's cross. Another story says aspen was punished to shudder for eternity, as the only tree that would not bow down to Jesus as he travelled to Calvary. In the Scottish Highlands, aspen is avoided for midsummer fires, and farming and fishing implements should not be made from it.

Unsurprisingly for such a noisy tree, aspen folklore relates to air and communication. An aspen leaf under the tongue bestows eloquence, usually a gift from the faery queen. In the Ogham, the ancient Irish tree alphabet, whispering aspen is *commaín carat*: 'the exchange of friends'.

Next time you see an aspen tree – whether you are admiring its fresh green rustling leaves in the springtime or cheered by the golden yellow of aspen's autumn foliage – you might want to whisper in return: "I know your story." ^{CF}



Lisa Schneidau has worked in British nature conservation for more than 20 years. A professional storyteller and the author of *Woodland Folk Tales of Britain and Ireland*, she lives on Dartmoor. lischneidau.co.uk



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Calling budding nature writers

Has your passion for nature grown as lockdown kept you cooped up at home? Do you enjoy expressing your love for nature by putting pen to paper? Then enter our New Nature Writer of the Year competition for a chance to have your piece published in *BBC Countryfile Magazine*

Words: Joe Pontin Illustration: Andy Lovell

If things go according to plan, many of us will begin emerging from our enforced seclusion this spring and summer, and at last be able to escape our homes and immerse ourselves in the natural beauty of the countryside.

During the restrictions of the past year, many of us have been more sensitive than ever to nature. Even simple, fleeting moments have seemed precious, eternal. While our lives took a strange and troubling turn, we cherished the soothing song of a blackbird, the scent of blossom on the breeze and the final golden flare of sunshine before dark.

We know that during this time many of you may have begun to articulate your love for the natural world in diaries, blogs or social media. As a result, we thought this is the perfect time to celebrate the art of nature writing, and give a platform to those of you with a talent for writing about the natural world.

That's why we are launching the first *BBC Countryfile Magazine* New Nature Writer of the Year competition. All you have to do is write us a short piece. We'd love to hear from you!

WHAT TO WRITE ABOUT

The theme for your story is 'An escape to nature'.

To enter, send us 600–800 words describing an aspect of the natural world that you have witnessed in

person. This could be an observation of wildlife or landscape, or an exploration of the impact an encounter or experience had on you.

As we read your entry, we want to feel as though we are standing beside you. Your piece should have a vivid atmosphere and create a strong sense of place. How did this experience of the natural world affect you? Did the experience change your mind? Did it move you?

“Fill your paper with the breathings of your heart”

William Wordsworth

Remember the poet William Wordsworth's words when he urged: “Fill your paper with the breathings of your heart.”

THE PRIZE

If you're chosen as the winner by our panel of expert judges, your story will be published in *BBC Countryfile Magazine*'s September issue.

WHAT'S A 'NEW WRITER'?

We're keen to hear new voices – those who have never published nature

writing in print, for a national audience. But you CAN take part if you have written about nature in local newspapers, or other print media with a limited audience. It's also fine to enter if you've written blogs and web features about the natural world.

WHO CAN ENTER?

The competition is open to all residents of the UK, including the Channel Islands, except employees or contractors of Immediate Media and anyone connected with the competition or their direct family members. There is no minimum age for entrants.

HOW AND WHEN DO I ENTER?

- Please send your entry by email only, to newnaturewoty@countryfile.com.
- Paste the text into the body of the email, rather than attaching it in a document.
- Don't forget to include your full name, your address, your email address and daytime telephone number.
- Entrants aged under 18 must state their age with their competition entry, and confirm that they have permission to enter from their parent or guardian.

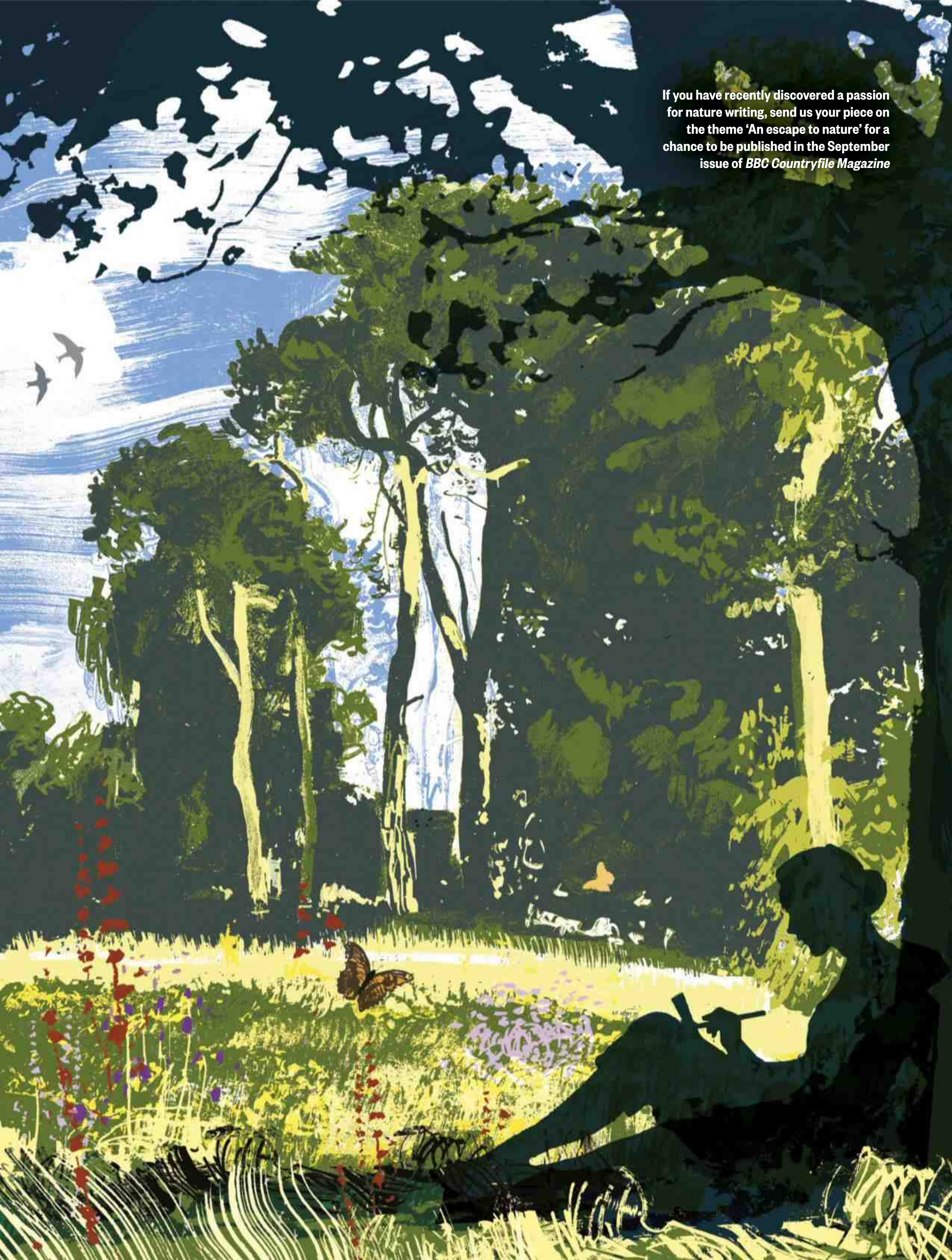
The closing date for entries is 11.59pm on 9 June 2021. Good luck! 🍀

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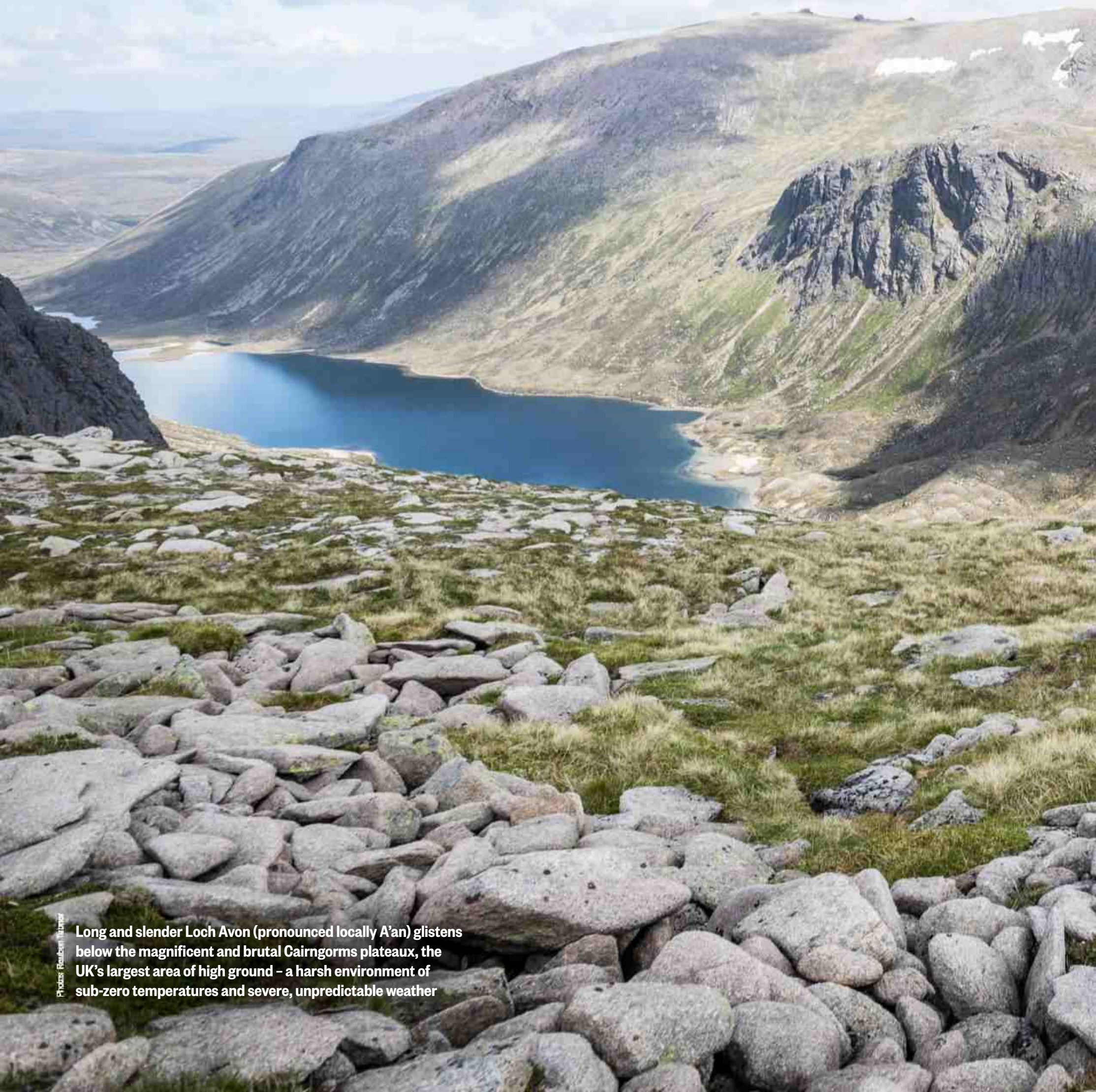
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If you have recently discovered a passion for nature writing, send us your piece on the theme 'An escape to nature' for a chance to be published in the September issue of *BBC Countryfile Magazine*



SPRING ON THE MOUNTAIN

The high plateaux of the Cairngorms is a rugged place with a subarctic climate. But when spring sunshine melts most of the snow, this rocky upland bursts into life with rare alpine wildflowers, cold-loving birds and hardy mammals, writes Cairngorms ecologist **Andrew Painting**

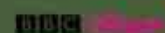


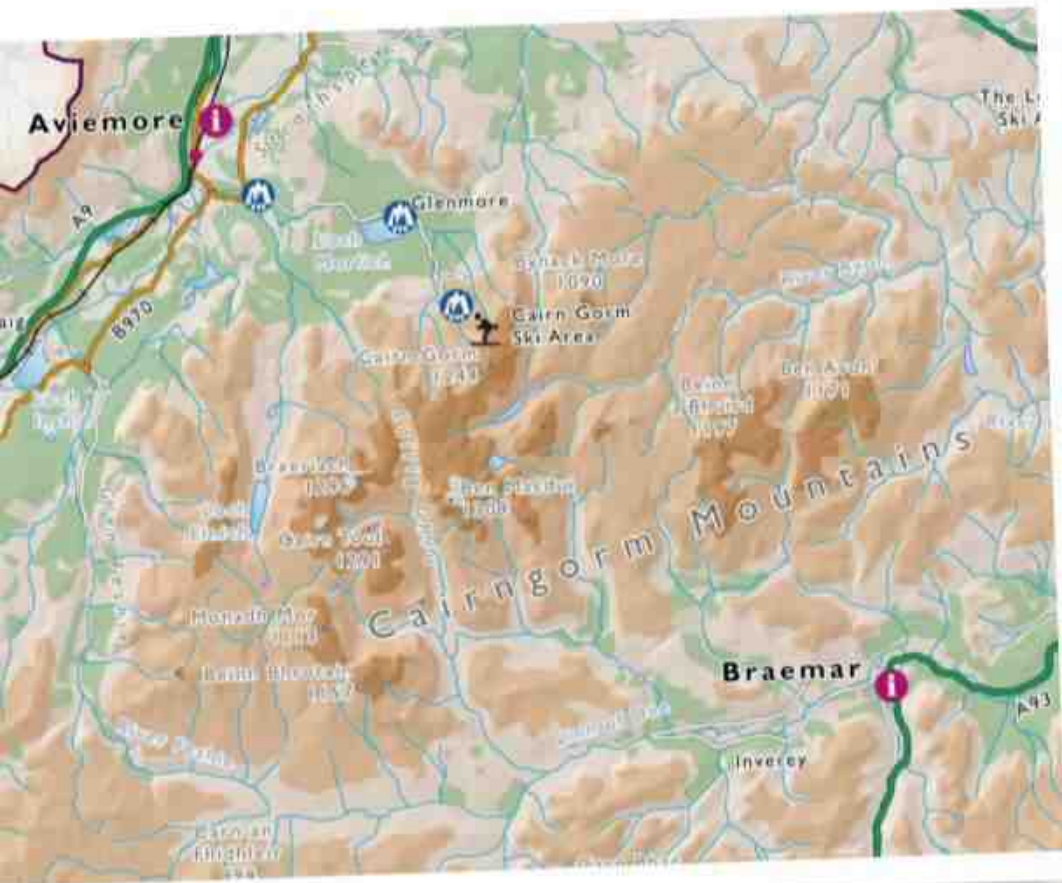
Long and slender Loch Avon (pronounced locally A'an) glistens below the magnificent and brutal Cairngorms plateaux, the UK's largest area of high ground – a harsh environment of sub-zero temperatures and severe, unpredictable weather



Watch!

See more of the Cairngorms on BBC Two's *Winterwatch 2021*, available on iPlayer





ABOVE Many of the peaks on the plateaux rise to over 1,200m, the highest being Ben Macdui at 1,309m

On a fine spring day, there is no place more welcoming than the high, snowy plateaux of our largest mountain region: Am Monadh Ruadh (red hills), the Cairngorms. But when the wind gets up, the cloud comes down and the temperature plummets, there are few places more miserable.

The Cairngorms are less a range of peaks than one giant, ancient lump of pink granite. Over millions of years this lump has been eroded, scoured out by ice and cleaved into three by two mountain passes. It is topped by miles of flat plateaux. This is a place of extremes and contradictions, and the species that make this hostile place their home have found ways to use these contradictions to their advantage. If you can withstand the cold, then you will have little competition up here for resources. A subarctic highland surrounded by temperate lowlands, it is both a sanctuary and a prison for its cold-loving inhabitants.

To see this place for yourself, you'll have to pass through a series of 'ecotones' – the ecologist's word for the transitional zones between different biological communities – each less hospitable than the last.

Find a burn among the Caledonian pinewoods in the lower glens and follow it upwards. As you cross the treeline into the open ground, passing through a band of wind- and cold-stunted pines, you might spot reindeer. These semi-wild animals were brought to the Cairngorms in the 1950s as



RARE HABITATS OF THE PLATEAUX

High plateau 1,000m+

Strong winds, no shelter, extended periods of snow and minimal soil – these are harsh conditions. But life continues: expect to see woolly fringe-moss (1), reindeer lichen (2), three-leaved rush (3), stiff sedge (4), wavy hairgrass (5), trailing azalea (6), moss campion (7), dwarf willow (8), alpine clubmoss (9) and crowberry. Mountain hares graze (10), while

dotterels (11) and ptarmigans (12) forage among rocks and scree splattered with map lichen (13).

Late-lying snowbeds 800-1,300m

These form in sheltered areas on the plateaux and corries (steep-sided hollows). Snow buntings (14) forage at the edges where in spring craneflies may become trapped in



ice. As the snow melts, plants spring up, including dwarf cornel, hare's-foot sedge, russet sedge, least cinquefoil, starry saxifrage, alpine willowherb and alpine lady's-mantle, a dinky version of the cottage garden plant.

Corrie walls 750-1,250m

Among these steep rocky outcrops, rare Arctic-alpine plants flourish. Ring ouzels (15) and wheatears (16) hop among Arctic mouse-ear, alpine

foxtail, whortle-leaved willow, roseroot, thrift and alpine willowherb.

Montane heath and pasture 650-1,200m

Glimpse red grouse, ring ouzels and meadow pipits among heather, blaeberry, cloudberry and deergrass. Purple-flowering alpine saw-wort, bright yellow tormentil and globeflower and nodding blue harebell bloom among wavy hairgrass and mat-grass.

Montane scrub (in corries) 600-800m

'Krummholz' Scots pines – stunted by the harsh conditions – persist among other woody-stemmed plants such as juniper and downy willow. Look out for lemon-scented fern, great wood-rush (17), northern blaeberry and European goldenrod – a common garden plant.

Mountain burn 600-1,200m

High-level burns are more nutrient

rich than the lochans (small lakes) found in the high Cairngorms, providing nourishment for hawkweeds, rowan and yellow saxifrage. By the water, you might see the nodding frames of grey wagtails, a dipper hunting from the rocks, a water vole or common frog.

- 18. Golden eagle
- 19. Snow bunting nest
- 20. Reindeer
- 21. Fir clubmoss



ABOVE The summit of Cairn Lochan – at 1,216m – affords magnificent views across the Cairngorms plateaux

an anthropological experiment. They liked it so much, they stayed.

Keep following the burn, into the heaths. Here, wind-clipped heather, blaeberry, cowberry and crowberry slink low to the ground. Bearberry sticks to the dry areas, while cloudberry, with its large, floppy white flowers, hides under heather. Snow-slicked burnside gravels burst with rarer plants: mountain sorrel, washed downstream from the highest hills, colonises bare patches, while starry saxifrage adds some glamour to proceedings.

Push higher, legs aching, and you'll reach the corries. These glacial amphitheatres

“Snow-slicked gravels burst with rarer plants: mountain sorrel and starry saxifrage”

harbour small pockets of richer soils. Here, great woodrush and lemon-scented fern form tall herb communities that are generously sprinkled with goldenrod, globeflower and alpine saw-wort. Linger a while among the buzzing bumblebees in the blaeberry and you will be serenaded by singing ring ouzels and wheatears, while peregrines stare down from the cliffs above.

Those seeking botanical rarities may never make it to the plateau. Instead, they will find themselves distracted by the corrie walls. Here, where snow leaches precious

nutrients out of base-poor granite, grow gems: alpine willowherb, alpine speedwell, Arctic mouse-ear. Hardy plants usually found near the sea also make a living here, such as roseroot, scurvygrass and thrift. Rare montane willows cling to cliff-edges and steep burn-sides. Once almost lost due to high levels of grazing, these shrubs are now making a tentative return, thanks to the efforts of dedicated conservationists.

CLIMB TO THE LONELY HEIGHTS

Ignore these distractions, if you can, and you will top out on to the roof of Scotland, over 1,000 metres high. Here, at the source of

your burn, you might find yourself at a snow patch. In most years, the Cairngorms holds its snow all year round, in small patches that

generate their own miniature ecosystems. As the snows melt, they reveal vivid carpets of greens, reds and yellows. This mass of mosses and liverworts is comprised of species that cannot survive anywhere else. They are joined by remarkably beautiful flowers: dwarf cornel, monochrome, elegant; marsh marigold, bright yellow, vivacious. Dotterels pick at the icy edges for insects.

The plateau stretches out into the distance, shimmering in the haze. Up here only the smallest flecks of soil accumulate around windswept runnels, and plants

Field guide PLANTS OF THE CAIRNGORMS PLATEAUX

1 Dwarf cornel

Cornus suecica

This diminutive, monochromatic member of the dogwood family bursts with red berries in the autumn.

2 Dwarf willow

Salix herbacea

Our smallest 'tree', with dark-green serrated leaves and striking red catkins.

3 Moss campion

Silene acaulis

A pincushion of fine green leaves and five-petalled pink flowers.

4 Alpine clubmoss

Diphasiastrum alpinum

Crawling tendrils sprawl out across the ground, sometimes for several metres.

5 Starry saxifrage

Saxifraga stellaris

Found in wetter areas, like the edge of snow-patches. Two small yellow dots adorn each pearly-white petal.

6 Stiff sedge *Carex bigelowii*

It's a sedge, and it's stiff. The diagnostic 'stiffness' helps the plant survive in the windiest places.

7 Three-leaved rush

Juncus trifidus

Like many grasses, this hardy Arctic species has remarkably beautiful but tiny flowers.

8 Trailing azalea

Kalmia procumbens

A tiny shrub, never growing more than a few centimetres high, with red-pink flowers.

9 Woolly fringe-moss

Racomitrium lanuginosum

Tough, slightly ugly, and a born survivor.



Field guide FAUNA OF THE CAIRNGORMS PLATEAUX



OTHER HIGH HABITATS

A Ben Lawers, Highlands: The highest mountain in the southern Highlands is home to a huge variety of Arctic-alpine plants, and a great place to see our only montane specialist butterfly, the mountain ringlet.

B Dartmoor: It may be warmer and more southerly than Britain's other mountain regions, but don't be fooled – this is a wild and often dangerous place, with its tors reaching altitudes over 2,000 feet.

C Helvellyn, Lake District: On the beautiful, rugged slopes of England's third-highest mountain, the John Muir Trust has embarked on an innovative, 15-year project to restore the fortunes of some of the UK's rarest plant species.

D Snowdonia: Wales' highest hills are the only place in Britain where you can find the beautiful and delicate Snowdon lily.

must hug the ground to survive. Woolly fringe-moss, grey, unassuming, is dominant here, while reindeer-moss provides forage for its namesake. Three-leaved rush and stiff sedge grow tenaciously among the gravel, and trailing azalea produces showy pink flowers. Dwarf willow sprawls along the ground, bonsai in extremis. Lichen-stained boulder fields harbour ptarmigan nests, mountain hares and moss campion. Monochromatic male snow buntings sing their glorious song from the summit cairns, while the females Hoover up crumbs left by walkers. And high above soars the soul of the mountain, the golden eagle.

The high plateau is the least disturbed ecosystem in the country, but even here humans have their impacts. Visitors can disturb nesting birds when they step off the easily eroded footpaths. Plants that can happily withstand gale-force winds and temperatures of -10°C cannot survive the repeated footfall of humans. And of course, the impact of climate change lurks like a broken spectre. As the mountains warm, boisterous plants from lower altitudes are taking advantage, colonising the slopes,

outcompeting the subarctic specialists. Recent research has shown that dotterels are moving 25 metres up the hill every decade. Soon they will simply run out of hill to move up to. Moulting mountain hares are coming out of sync with the annual cycle of snowfall. The precious summer snow patches and the unique species that they maintain may not survive into the future.

For all that, the massif remains our wildest landscape, a hostile habitat to humans, even on the most glorious of spring days. We are drawn to the high mountains because they reveal to us our limitations. Through showing us what we are not, the unique assemblage of life that thrives on the plateau reminds us of what it is to be human. ^{CF}

Visiting remote uplands can be dangerous. Safely enjoy our wild places by following safety advice from Mountain Rescue. scottishmountainrescue.org



Andrew Painting has worked as an ecologist at the Mar Lodge Estate in the Cairngorms since 2016, and is the author of *Regeneration: the Rescue of a Wild Land* (see page 95).

1 Dotterel

Charadrius morinellus

A beautiful, diminutive wader with creamy eyebrows, russet breast and olive-green back.

2 Golden eagle

Aquila chrysaetos

A giant, with a wingspan of over two metres. Look out for the gingery neck and long, upturned wings.

3 Meadow pipit

Anthus pratensis

Streaky brown, with a distinctive song and a dramatic display flight.

4 Mountain hare

Lepus timidus

Pure white in winter, blue-brown in summer, with small ears to keep the cold out.

5 Ptarmigan *Lagopus muta*

By springtime, these small grouse are turning slate grey, perfectly camouflaged among the boulders.

6 Reindeer *Rangifer tarandus*

An Arctic wanderer, a semi-wild herd roams the high hills from spring to autumn.

7 Ring ouzel *Turdus torquatus*

An upland thrush, very similar to a blackbird but with a distinctive white bib.

8 Snow bunting

Plectrophenax nivalis

One of our rarest and most beautiful songbirds, with a UK population of around 50 pairs.

9 Northern wheatear

Oenanthe oenanthe

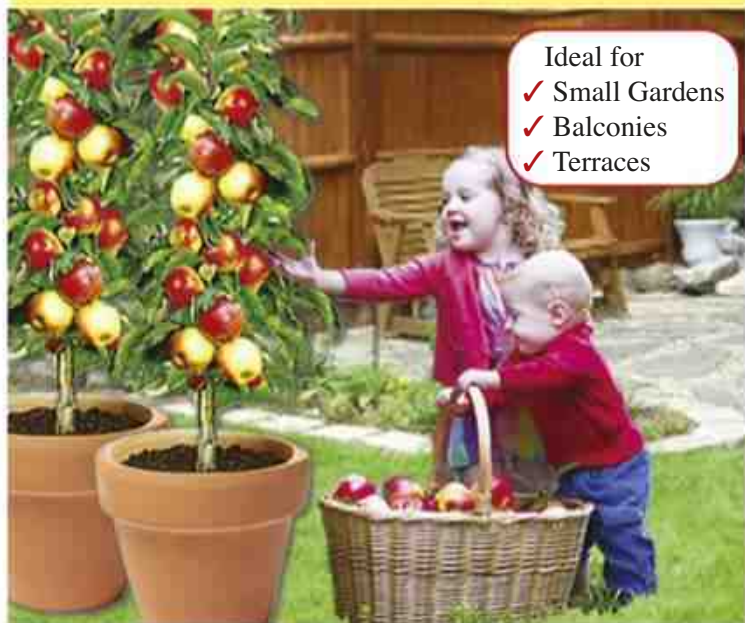
Smart, with a black eyebrow, warm orange front and a bright white patch on the rump.



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COUNTRYFILE ISSUES

JOHN CRAVEN

URGENT CALLS TO 'LEVEL UP' RURAL BRITAIN

Britain's rural communities are reaching breaking point after decades of inadequate investment in public services such as transport, in affordable housing and in measures to boost their economies. Rural areas face the triple threat of higher costs, lower funding and greater need.

That's the verdict of leading countryside groups who urged the Chancellor Rishi Sunak to deal specifically with rural issues in his recent budget. Well, that didn't happen. Instead the Chancellor invited "high priority" areas across the UK to bid for shares in a £4.8 billion "Levelling Up Fund".

There was also a £1 billion kitty for 45 English towns and a £220 million Community Renewal Fund – but nothing directly focused on the hard-pressed countryside at a time when research shows that spending by Whitehall on public infrastructure is 44% higher in urban areas than in rural ones.

"But far from using the budget to address this, the Government has let the chance slide past," says Crispin Truman, chief executive of CPRE, the countryside charity. "The green leadership that the Government's rhetoric promises isn't borne out as we see economic policies being pursued that could disadvantage the lives of people in rural communities and worsen the climate crisis. It simply doesn't add up," he says. "The challenges to the economy following the pandemic could



The building of new low-cost homes, such as these in Powys, Wales, is essential to boost rural economies, says CPRE

have been met head-on with climate-friendly, community-boosting green measures."

CPRE was joined by English Rural (provider of community-led affordable housing), the Rural Services Network (RSN), and Britain's Leading Edge (representing large rural councils) in calling on Sunak to address rural disadvantage. Research commissioned by the group revealed that, for every 100,000 people, 36% more houses classed as affordable are built in towns and cities than in rural areas. For each rural dweller, £301 is allocated from Government capital funding – for someone living in an urban area it's £434.

"The evidence emerging from this research tells those of us working with rural communities something we know all too well – that public investment and policy-making favours urban solutions to rural problems,"

asserts Martin Collett of English Rural. "The views and needs of rural communities are overlooked because of urban-bias decision-making embedded across Whitehall."

NEED FOR FUNDING PARITY

Graham Biggs, chief executive of RSN, welcomed measures to extend coronavirus support that helps rural businesses and families. But he argues that levelling up should be within regions rather than between regions, to ensure greater parity between rural and urban areas. Of the £4.8 billion pot, with its focus on economic recovery, regeneration and transport, Biggs says: "On the face of it most rural areas will tick all those boxes, but without information on which areas are selected, it's impossible to say if there's been any rural proofing."

Steve Barclay, chief secretary to the Treasury, has pledged that no community will be left behind and funds will be allocated irrespective of administrative borders. But many campaigners are demanding that a taskforce be set up to ensure rural disadvantage gets the same priority as urban deprivation on the "levelling up" agenda.

The Government will need to make sure the countryside gets its fair share of the funding on offer if it is to quell those angry voices who believe the powers in London regard them as mere afterthoughts in the hinterlands.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

SHOULD GROUSE MOORS BE LICENSED?

The Scottish Government is proposing a licensing system for driven grouse shooting. The plan is welcomed by campaigners concerned about environmental damage to moorland and wildlife crime, but vigorously opposed by landowners, reports **Mark Rowe**



WHAT IS THE NEW SYSTEM?

Details are still to be published but the proposal is that Scottish moorland estates will require a licence in order to shoot grouse. This licence can be withdrawn should strong evidence emerge of breaches of codes of practice or unlawful activity. The new law shifts the burden of proof on to landowners to show they are behaving, and away from wildlife campaigners having to prove wrongdoing.

WHAT IS THE CASE FOR LICENSING?

The proposal aims to address wide-ranging concerns about grouse shooting, including the illegal killing of birds of prey and inappropriate heather burning. In a related move, the *Animals and Wildlife (Penalties, Protections and Powers) (Scotland) Act 2020* bans



the unlicensed culling of mountain hares and made them a protected species. "This will all give the law added teeth," says Dougie Peedle, head of policy at Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT). "Hopefully wildlife crime will become a thing of the past."

All these claims are disputed by the industry. Grouse shooting is a polarising issue – the moors are viewed by some as a playground for the rich, but by landowners as integral to a way of life. "Grouse moor management is a complex issue, attracting strong views and public interest," said Mairi Gougeon, former Scottish minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment.

LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

Central to the licensing system is better environmental management. This focuses mainly on the impact of muirburn, or burning moorland. The proposed new law will require a licence from NatureScot (Scotland's nature agency) to burn heather, while peatland burning will be banned outright. Controlled and limited heather burning is a recognised and uncontroversial conservation tool: it drives variety in vegetation structure while birds, insects and reptiles can also benefit. The Wildlife Trusts says without some degree of grazing and/or burning, moorland generally reverts to woodland. Grouse-moor managers burn areas of older heather to reduce vegetation cover and encourage new growth of green shoots to feed grouse.

But the Wildlife Trusts says where burning is too intensive, heather is lost and moorland is converted to species-poor rush- and grass-dominated habitats. The risk of fire getting into deep peat is real and this can burn uncontrollably. This leads to the depletion of peat as an important carbon sink. SWT's Dougie Peedle says: "In a time of climate emergency, it's hard to fathom why we would damage our peatlands; 70% of Scottish peatlands are in a poor state, which means they now emit carbon."

Flooding is another concern. In 2015, the Climate Change Committee, which gives statutory advice on flood prevention, warned that burning heather reduced moorland's ability to retain water and also reduced areas of peat. "Peatlands play an important role in flood prevention," says Peedle. The Moorland Association says there is no link between burning heather and flooding, and that overgrazing and lack of tree cover are greater contributors.



Photos: Getty, RSPB

120
grouse estates in Scotland



The number of jobs grouse shooting creates

1,500

(Source: Moorland Association)



300

The number of hen harrier pairs possible in England without persecution

(Source: RSPB)



Raptor populations in Scotland

Scotland has around 460 pairs of hen harriers, but the bird has declined on grouse moors by 57% since 2010, says the RSPB. A third of satellite-tagged golden eagles have disappeared, most of them over moors managed for grouse shooting. "Only a tiny number of birds are tagged, so they're the ones we know about," says Ian Thomson, head of investigations, RSPB Scotland. "They are the proverbial tip of the iceberg. In reality we are looking at up to 50 golden eagles being illegally killed each year."



WILDLIFE CRIME

Persecution of birds of prey is a major problem associated with grouse moors. Licensing would shift the burden of proof on to landowners when it comes to wildlife crime. At the moment, while criminal prosecutions are a deterrent, it has proven difficult to secure convictions. The change would mean estates would have to respond to claims about raptor persecution or risk losing their licence. The ban on unlicensed culling of mountain hares is in response to Scottish Government figures that suggest about 26,000 hares are killed every year. A 2018 report said mountain hare numbers on moorland in the eastern Highlands is less than 1% of their levels in the 1950s. The Scottish Gamekeepers' Association disputes this and says more hares are recorded on grouse moors than on moors where shooting does not take place.

"We believe driven grouse shooting and associated land management practices must be regulated"

The RSPB

WHAT DOES THE GROUSE SHOOTING INDUSTRY SAY?

Landowners and gamekeepers say the scheme will wrap grouse shooting in red tape. According to the Moorland Association, shooting provides essential income and is responsible for more than 1,500 jobs in the countryside, and the proposals jeopardise income for hundreds of local people.

Adam Gilruth of the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) says: "If Scotland loses yet more grouse estates, we risk losing more of this increasingly rare yet iconic moorland habitat, the species that depend on it, and the social and economic life that goes with them." The GWCT argues that the demise of grouse moors would adversely affect hen harriers and that, without management, the land would revert to scrub and forest. It also points to the 10-year Langholm Moor Demonstration Project, which monitored the



relationship between birds of prey, red grouse, other predators, such as foxes, and the state of the heather moorland. This found hen harriers do better on grouse moors that are well managed than they do on untended moors, and suggested that legal predator control could benefit ground-nesting raptors. Wildlife campaigners point to a caveat in the report: that such benefits were outweighed by more widespread illegal control (by gamekeepers killing birds of prey and other predators).

Could licensing happen elsewhere in the UK?

Natural England data shows 72% of satellite-tagged hen harriers were confirmed or considered very likely to have been illegally killed. It also found that hen harriers are 10 times more likely to die or disappear over grouse moors. In 2018, there were just nine breeding pairs of hen harrier in England. Conservationists say England's moors are large enough to host 300 pairs. The RSPB says it doesn't oppose gamebird shooting provided it's carried out legally and on an environmentally sustainable basis, but it hopes similar licensing will be introduced in England: "Where the criminal killing of birds of prey continues and land management practices are becoming increasingly environmentally unsustainable – such as vegetation burning on peatland – we believe driven grouse shooting and associated land management practices must be regulated."

Have your say? What do you think about the issues raised here? Write to the address on page three or email editor@countryfile.com

Scents of calm

You know spring is here the moment you notice its glorious scent on the breeze. But why does nature create this fragrant symphony? What is it made up of and what effect does it have on our brains?

Jane Adams explores the science of wild scents

I'm digging over a new vegetable patch. Earth that has been cold for months has been touched by warm sunshine. As I turn the warming soil, it releases a smell so delicious I could happily roll in it. Forget the meteorological start of spring – the season starts right here. It's the aroma of worms pushing up casts and dragging down decay. It's green and uplifting, and floods your brain with a feeling of contentment, hinting at the promise of new life.

Humans must have been aware of this earthy, primal smell for millennia – our noses are particularly sensitive to it. The phenomenon is most noticeable when it wafts up from warm, newly turned soil or after spring rain has fallen on dry earth. But it didn't even have a common name until the 1960s, when two Australian scientists wrote a paper and christened it petrichor: *petra* (stone) and *ichor* (ethereal fluid). The source of the smell is a humble molecule named geosmin, which is derived from a single genus of bacteria: *Streptomyces*, a rich source of antibiotics.

For a while, the smell of petrichor is an isolated, albeit welcome, natural scent in the garden. But as weeks pass, the breeze turns sweeter. In the countryside, woodland plants spring into action, making the most of sunlight through the skeletal canopy. With a growth spurt to rival any teenager, their leaves push skywards with flowers and scent soon following. It's a race. Seeds need to have formed before oak, birch and beech leaves

“Blooms burst from leafless twigs, their aroma reminiscent of freshly laundered sheets”

smother the woodland floor with shade.

Out for a walk, the subtle aroma of wild daffodils pulls me to Mountain Clump – a small, wooded hill overlooking our Dorset village. The smell isn't strong; in fact, its green leafiness with a hint of vanilla comes and goes as I struggle up the hill. But on reaching the top, I realise I'm not alone in the pursuit of scent. Fresh out of hibernation, queen bumblebees crawl drunkenly from flower to flower,

intoxicated. In the valley, blackthorn is flowering. From above, this hedgerow shrub looks dusted in snow and meanders chalk-white across the valley floor, following the tarmac of the country lanes. Up close, its blooms burst from black-spiked and leafless twigs, their pure, clean aroma reminiscent of freshly laundered sheets on a wind-whipped washing line.

I contact Amanda Tuke, a London-based botanist, to quiz her on her favourite urban spring scent. “It's the delicate almond fragrance of winter heliotrope carpeting the banks of my local railway station,” she tells

me. I'm surprised. Only the week before, I'd seen this same plant with “hand-sized circular leaves and bushy pink flowers” on the verge of a lane nearby. Except there was one big difference. To me, it smelt like honey, not almonds.

FRAGRANT FRUSTRATION

Try to describe a smell and, unless you're a perfumier or sommelier, you are likely to struggle. Some researchers think this phenomenon



1 The sweet aroma of bluebells is the essence of a woodland in spring **2** Even foxes can be distracted by blooms **3** Inhaling the sweet aroma of apple blossom releases feel-good hormones **4** Blackthorn's fragrance is loved by pollinators **5** Freshly turned damp soil emits the alluring fragrance of geosmin





A



B



C



D



E



F



G

SEVEN SUBLIME SPRING SCENTS

A Dandelion *Taraxacum officinale*

A scent to make you smile. Hints of carefree childhood, sunshine and bees. Found on lawns, grassland, roadsides and waste ground.

B Wild daffodil *Narcissus pseudonarcissus*

Vanilla ice cream with a hint of green. The scent of spring cheerfulness. Grows in woods, orchards and grassland.

C Native bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*

Once smelt, its calming, fruity scent (unlike near-scentless Spanish bluebells) stays etched on your memory. In hedges, woods and grassland.

D Wild garlic or ramsons *Allium ursinum*

Like walking into a French restaurant. Both the flowers and leaves have a comforting, pungent garlic scent. Grows in damp woodlands.

E Common gorse *Ulex europaeus*

Coconut sun-lotion. One sniff can transport you to a sunny Mediterranean beach. Found on heaths, rough grassland, commons and seacliffs.

F Sweet violet *Viola odorata*

Parma violets. Soft, powdery and floral like the sweets and great-granny's perfume. Smelt in woodland edges and hedgerows.

G Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*

Clean, refreshing aroma. Reminiscent of freshly laundered sheets on a wind-whipped washing line. In woods, scrubby areas and hedgerows.

is caused by the way our brains process scent and language. Whereas we might find it easy to visually describe a bluebell as being ‘rounded’ and ‘smooth’ with ‘nodding’ flowers, when it comes to its scent, the most imaginative word we might use is, well, ‘bluebell-y’. It could also be that, as English speakers, we just don’t have a need for these words anymore. Elsewhere in the world, the Maniq, a small group of hunter-gatherers in southern Thailand, have up to 15 expressions used to describe smells, but they rely on scent for their survival.

Not only do we stumble over words, but we also differ in how we physically experience aromas. Whereas Amanda’s ‘almond’ may be my ‘honey’, the receptors high up in our nose sometimes struggle to pick up certain smells, or we might hate some odours that others love. Male or female, young or old, all things are not equal when it comes to our fickle sense of smell.

I love dandelions. Their scent reminds me of being a nature-mad six-year-old, stuffing my pockets with feathers, yellow dandelions and pine cones. It feels strange to remember something so clearly from 50 years ago, but smell has a more direct connection to the part of our brain dealing with memory than any of our other main senses. A smell really can transport us back to another time and place.

Of course, these floral scents are not meant for human noses; it’s a happy coincidence that we find them so alluring. Their chief purpose is to attract pollinators, such as bees, moths and beetles. Exuding chemical aromas from their petals, plants are able to attract just the right insects; they rely on their six-legged allies to transfer pollen. Fragrance is their trump card when it comes to reproduction.

For us, it’s more of a mood thing. For years it was thought humans could



TOP The honey-scented blooms of winter heliotrope provide nectar for early insects
ABOVE Just the smell of dandelions is enough to evoke strong childhood memories for many

only detect around 10,000 aromas; it’s now thought this number could be nearer to one trillion. No wonder, then, that we crave fragrant smells after the long, cold, smell-deficient days of winter. As we bury our nose into spring flowers and the minute aroma compounds are picked up by the smell receptors high in the lining of our nose, we seem to instinctively know the brain’s ‘happy hormones’ – serotonin and dopamine – will be released to help lift us out of our winter doldrums.

As therapies to enhance mood and lower stress – such as forest bathing – gather popularity, scientists at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences have been carrying out a multi-sensory virtual reality

experiment into physiological stress. To the surprise of the research team, the smell of grass, fir trees and mushrooms reduced the stress response more than seeing a forest or park, or hearing birdsong. It seems there’s more to smell than meets the eye. Marcus Hedblom, an ecologist involved in the project, feels we need to know more: “What we really would like to do is go deeper into this and try different types of smell, and try to see which one has the strongest effect.”

At a time when thousands affected by Covid have lost or noticed their sense of smell change, albeit temporarily for most, perhaps a better appreciation for this somewhat overlooked and underused sense is overdue. Maybe National Sense of Smell Day on 24 April gives us the perfect excuse. All we need to do is find a park or wood, smell the flowers, sniff the earth, notice the petrichor, the geosmin, the newly cut grass. Now, more than ever, we could do with lifting our mood and lowering stress with the scents of spring. **CF**



Jane Adams lives in Dorset, between the Jurassic coast and Cranborne Chase. When she’s not exploring the countryside, she can be found watching insects in her wildlife-friendly garden.



COVID AND RECOVERING YOUR SENSE OF SMELL

When the ability to inhale a smell (ortho-nasal olfaction) has changed or been lost, or the flavour of food (retro-nasal olfaction) has altered, the NHS recommends ‘smell training’ to help recovery. This easy exercise consists of sniffing four

scents twice a day for 20 seconds each, while concentrating on memories of each scent, even if no scent is perceived. Charities such as AbScent (abscent.org) and Fifth Sense (fifthsense.org.uk) offer free guides, self-tests and diary logs.

GREAT SCOTT

For 75 years, visitors have flocked to the wetland wildlife reserve at Slimbridge in Gloucestershire. **Frank Gardner** profiles its founder Sir Peter Scott – sailor, artist, pilot, broadcaster and one of Britain’s greatest conservationists

nature accessible to the general public and, in his own words, causing them to fall in love with it. Sir David Attenborough, who met him when they both worked for the BBC in the 1950s and 60s, once famously said of him: “Peter is and always will be the patron saint of conservation.”

HIS EARLIEST INSPIRATION

Scott was just two years old when his father, the celebrated Antarctic explorer Robert Falcon Scott, died in 1912 on his doomed mission to the South Pole. Shortly before he died, the explorer, whose fame generated the quaint expression ‘great Scott!’, wrote a letter to his wife asking her to: “Make the boy interested in natural history if you can. It is better than games.”

Peter Scott became interested in both. Educated at Oundle School in Northamptonshire and then Trinity College, Cambridge, he co-wrote and illustrated his first book on birds while still in his teens. He studied natural sciences and art history and, as a keen artist with a talent inherited from his mother, sculptor Kathleen Scott, he held his first exhibition in London at the age of just 23.

The following year he experienced something that changed his life. In 1933 Scott was swimming off the Lincolnshire coast when he got caught in a storm. Washed ashore near the village of Sutton Bridge, he found himself looking up at a lighthouse overlooking the Nene estuary and an area of untouched wilderness. Scott was so enthralled by the place he leased the lighthouse for £5 a year, refurbishing it and converting its reception room into his first art studio, painting there until the outbreak of the Second World War.

“Scott left behind him a treasure trove of intricate watercolours of the natural world”

BELOW Photographed in April 1911 on the British expedition to Antarctica, Captain Robert Falcon Scott died on the way back from the South Pole in 1912, when his son Peter was just an infant

Peter Scott was ahead of his time. The founder of the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) and co-founder of World Wildlife Fund (WWF) may have left us 32 years ago but his words could hardly have been more prophetic. “The most effective way to save the threatened and decimated natural world,” he said, “is to cause people to fall in love with it again, with its beauty and its reality.”

As the world wakes up to the devastating effects of climate change and loss of habitats on this planet’s vanishing wildlife, the groundbreaking work of this man is more important than ever. He was the first person to be knighted for services to conservation, in 1973, and one of his most important projects, the Red Data List, is still used today to alert the world to species under threat.

The multi-talented Scott achieved an incredible amount in his 80 years, leaving behind him a treasure trove of intricate watercolours of the natural world. But perhaps his greatest legacy is the network of wetland centres he founded across the UK, making



Photo: Getty, Shutterstock



Sir Peter Scott, seen here in 1987, also wrote and illustrated many books, including *Travel Diaries of a Naturalist*, *Coloured Key to the Wildfowl of the World*, and an autobiography *The Eye of the Wind*, published in 1966

Sir Peter Scott, seen here in 1954, built his art studio overlooking the lakes at Slimbridge, perfect for observing and painting wildfowl



Listen in

David Attenborough recalls puzzling over the existence of the Loch Ness Monster with Sir Peter Scott on *Monsters* on BBC Sounds: bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b010mww4



“Scott recognised individual birds by the minutest colour variations on their bills”

Scott showed an early prowess at sports, going on to win a bronze medal in sailing in the 1936 Olympic Games. Statues of the man erected years later tend to show a rather stout, thickset figure, usually draped in wet-weather clothing and always clutching a pair of binoculars. Yet he was a renowned sportsman, reaching national championship level in ice skating, and at the age of 53 he became British gliding champion.

Aged 30 when the Second World War broke out, Scott joined the Royal Navy as a sub-lieutenant, serving on a destroyer in the bitter conditions of the North Atlantic. He later commanded a steam gunboat in the English Channel, hunting down German fast attack craft known as ‘E-boats’. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for bravery and was also decorated with the CBE for designing an ingenious camouflage scheme for the navy’s warships.

FOR WETLANDS AND WILDFOWL

This sounds unbelievable, but initially Peter Scott shot birds for sport. Early in his life, however, he had an epiphanal moment when he watched a wounded bird that he himself had shot fighting for its life on the mudflats of East Anglia, something that helped inspire him to campaign for conservation.



TOP Sir Peter Scott with David Attenborough in an off-camera moment while filming for the BBC at Slimbridge in the 1960s

ABOVE Scott lived at East Bank Lighthouse from 1933–1939, where geese were constant and loved companions



For many people, Scott’s name is inextricably tied to Slimbridge Wetland Centre, the 169-hectare world-famous reserve in Gloucestershire that he founded and which is sometimes dubbed “the birthplace of modern conservation”. Freshwater wetlands, according to the WWT, cover less than 1% of the world’s surface and yet 40% of all species rely on them. In the UK, they account for 3% of the land yet they support 10% of our species. They have been called “the lifeblood” of our planet.

It was from Slimbridge that Scott presented the BBC’s first-ever live natural history programme in 1953. Opened in 1946, this 100-acre West Country nature reserve has become a haven for thousands of wildfowl, including the magnificent Bewick’s swans that fly in each winter from their Arctic breeding grounds in Russia. Scott studied and drew these with such extraordinary precision that he learnt to recognise individual birds by the minutest colour variations on their bills, giving them adopted names as he sketched them.

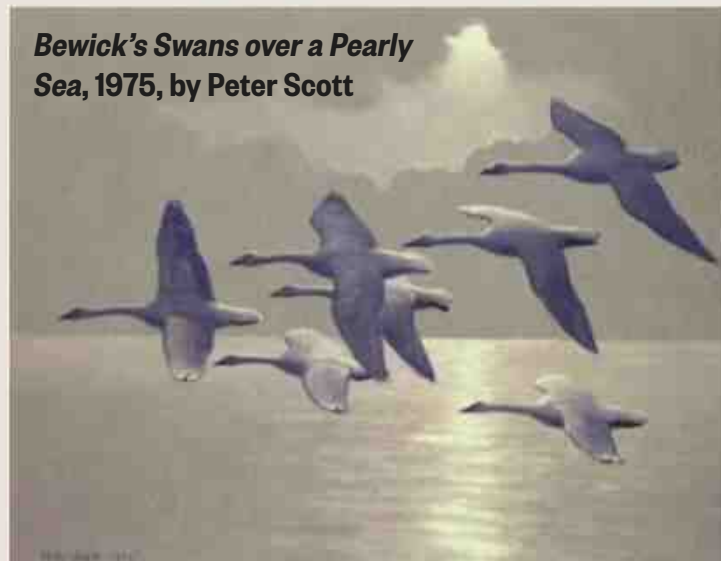
SCOTT: WILDLIFE ARTIST

Scott took up art while still at school. For him it was not just a hobby, it was a passion. He was always drawn to, and inspired by, the natural world, and his evocative paintings of wildfowl in flight and at rest have sold all over the world.

Scott studied art history at Cambridge University along with natural sciences – a perfect blending of his two life interests. Often painting out in the field, Scott kept prodigious notes and sketches on all the wildlife he observed. In terms of technique,

he was eclectic, using a mixture of ballpoint pen, felt-tip and paint to bring his subjects to life. He held his first exhibition in London in 1933, he became the founding President of the Society of Wildlife Artists in 1964 and his works have been displayed at the Royal Academy.

A book celebrating his work – *The Art of Peter Scott: Images From a Lifetime* – was published in 1992 with a foreword by HRH The Duke of Edinburgh, who was patron of the WWF at the time.



Bewick's Swans over a Pearly Sea, 1975, by Peter Scott


The practice of recording birds continues today – the WWT teams have logged more than 10,000 swans over the past five decades.

MORE THAN AN ORNITHOLOGIST

In 2009 I went to Slimbridge to make a 60-minute BBC Radio 4 documentary on Scott's life, featuring some of the latest projects, such as the breeding programme to reintroduce rare cranes. Interviewing his widow Lady Philippa Scott, an accomplished naturalist in her own right, in her magnificent study at her Slimbridge home, I discovered that Scott did not just draw birds.

It was the year before she died and the giant picture window looked out on to a constantly moving vista of ducks, geese and swans, often flying in with a noisy splash between the reeds. I remember it was hard to concentrate with so much activity on the other side of the window but Lady Scott wanted to show me her husband's notebooks from a trip they had

done to the tropical reefs of Indonesia. There, painted in exquisite detail, were countless illustrations of an underwater world inhabited by multi-coloured parrotfish, angelfish, triggerfish, grouper and butterflyfish. "You see?" Lady Scott turned to me with a smile, as I leafed through these precious mementos, "he was far more than just an ornithologist." And it's true. In 1988 the couple had a coral fish named after them: *Cirrhilabrus scottorum*.

Peter Scott's legacy is profound. He was a co-founder and first chairman of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), for which he designed the famous panda logo. The WWT still celebrates his "pioneering attitude and passion" saying that he is "the DNA that runs through everything we do". Many of the things he did and said ring so true today, and none more so than what he had to tell us about conservation. "We shan't save all we should like to," Scott said, "but we shall save a great deal more than if we had never tried." 



Frank Gardner is the BBC security

correspondent and president of the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). "My mother introduced me to birdwatching while we were living in the Netherlands. I always take my binoculars with me on reporting trips."



DON'T MISS

The author of this feature, the BBC's security correspondent, tells his own powerful personal story in *Being Frank: The Frank Gardner Story*, now available on BBC iPlayer.



EXPERIENCE SCOTT'S LEGACY

WWT Slimbridge Wetland Centre

The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust Reserve at Slimbridge in Gloucestershire (above) is often called the jewel in the crown of Britain's wetland centres. This flat, wide, windswept expanse of marsh, pasture and water attracts thousands of wildfowl, especially in winter when there is a surge of swans and ducks escaping the bitter Arctic winters. Up to 30,000 migrants flock here in the winter months, from October to March. White-fronted geese, teal, wigeon, merlin and peregrine falcons are among the birds you might expect to see in winter. From March, sand martins, swallows and cuckoos arrive, while kingfishers, warblers and lapwings start nesting.

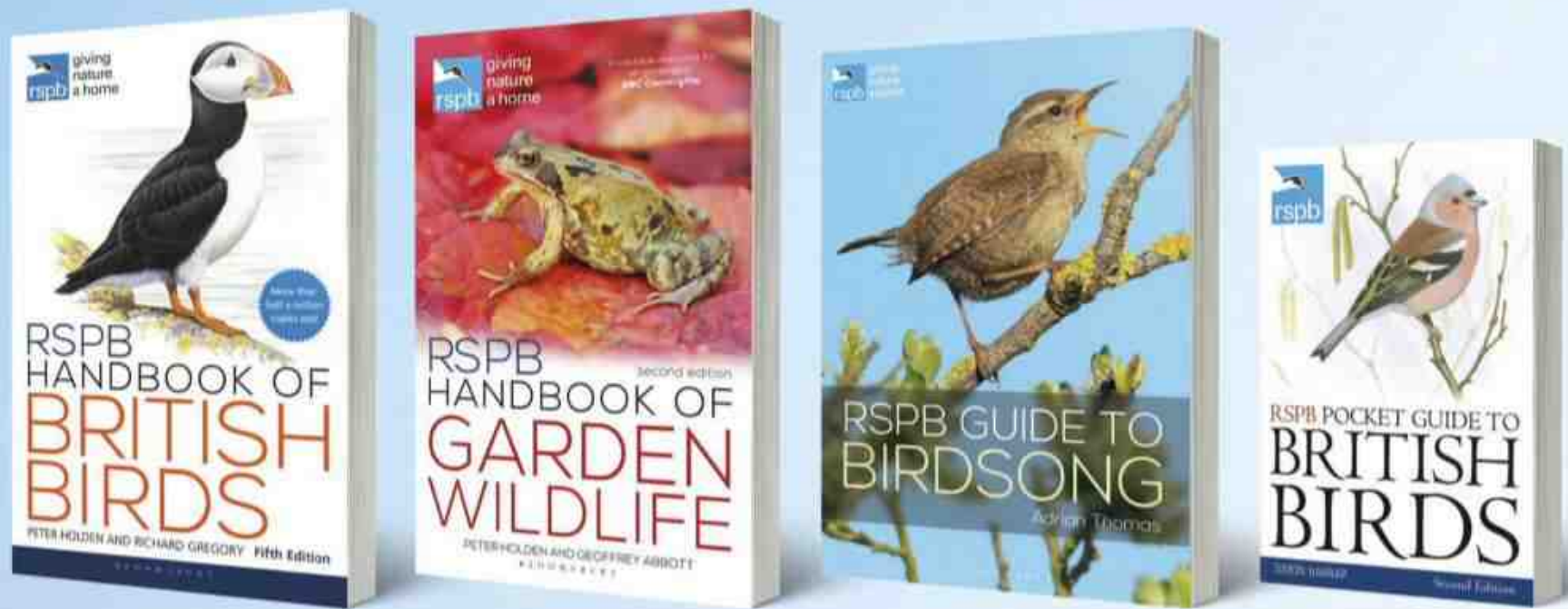
Managed year-round to cater for a well-balanced mix of birdlife, Slimbridge also has hides and attractions for children as well as a number of introduced species, such as flamingos. A visitor centre has extensive information about Peter Scott and examples of his drawings. It can also hold some surprises: here, in the reeds near the visitor centre, I caught sight of an elusive water vole, the only one I've ever seen. wwt.org.uk

Sir Peter Scott Walk, Norfolk/Lincolnshire

In 1933, at the age of 24, Peter Scott moved into a lighthouse (above) beside the River Nene at Sutton Bridge in Lincolnshire. There, surrounded by wild marshes teeming with birdlife, he hung up his wildfowling guns and turned instead to painting, inspiring in the process his friend Paul Gallico's classic 1941 novel *The Snow Goose*. Scott built ponds to attract geese and other birds and turned a room in the lighthouse into his painting studio, staying here until the Second World War started in 1939.

The 10.5-mile Sir Peter Scott Walk commemorates Scott's time here. The route begins at the passenger ferry across the Great Ouse at King's Lynn in Norfolk, and follows the old sea bank along the Wash to the lighthouse near the mouth of the Nene. Along the way there are views over the north Fens and the mudflats and saltmarshes on the shores of The Wash. Don't forget to bring your binoculars. There are car parks at either end of the route. King's Lynn Tourist Information Centre, **01553 763044**, visitnorfolk.co.uk

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Love and loss in the Lakes

Supernova, a new film starring Colin Firth and Stanley Tucci, puts the Lake District centre stage. **Nige Tassell** talks to its director Harry Macqueen





Stanley Tucci (left) and Colin Firth play Tusker and Sam, partners of 20 years who are coming to terms with Tusker's diagnosis with early onset dementia in this moving tale set in Lakeland

“We don’t make road movies very much in this country. It’s not part of our cinematic tradition. I wanted to challenge that”

Writer/director Harry Macqueen is explaining the thought processes behind his new film *Supernova*. Its centrepiece is a road trip to the Lake District taken by a middle-aged couple: novelist Tusker, played by Stanley Tucci, and Colin Firth’s concert pianist Sam. They are paying a visit to Sam’s childhood home, now the residence of his sister and her husband. But this isn’t a simple, happy homecoming.

Tusker is suffering from early-onset dementia and both are silently aware that this may be their last trip north that his condition will allow. As such, it’s an emotionally riveting, deeply affecting study of two people in love coming to terms with the encroachment of mortality.

Supernova might only be the second film Macqueen has directed, but it’s not the first road movie he has committed to celluloid. That was his Cornwall-set debut, 2014’s *Hinterland*. Sharing themes of love and change, the two films certainly feel like companion pieces based around a similar premise: the undertaking of a road trip to revisit old haunts and past lives.

But where *Hinterland* deals with the attempted rekindling of youth, *Supernova* tackles the overriding issue of late middle-age: the dimming of the day. It was no coincidence that it was shot, and is set, in autumn.

“The seasonal aspect was really important,” confirms Macqueen. “Tusker and Sam are in the autumn of their lives and there’s a beauty to that. The depth of their love for each other is mirrored by the depth and warmth of colour in that landscape. The colours are so deep and resonant in the Lake District at that time of year. It really made sense to shoot it then.”

LIBERATING LAKES

Macqueen knows the northern lakes well; his actor uncle Peter Macqueen, who plays Sam’s brother-in-law Clive, has lived just outside Keswick for the past 10 years and his nephew has been a frequent visitor. Macqueen also made several recces north with the celebrated cinematographer Dick Pope, scouting out ideal locations for particular scenes. “We drove around a lot and we talked a lot. And the story re-formed itself throughout that collaboration as I saw someone else’s visual input. That can liberate you from your own stuck-in-the-mud thoughts.”

The film was shot entirely on location over six weeks in the pre-lockdown autumn of 2019, with crew and cast all staying together in holiday lodges on a site around 10 miles



Colin Firth gamely drove the campervan on live, narrow Lakeland roads for many of the scenes BELOW Harry Mcqueen directing his A-list stars on location





outside Keswick. “Ironically, it was the perfect set-up for a pandemic shoot,” explains Macqueen, “even if we didn’t know it at the time. I know it sounds corny, but it really did feel like a big, extended family – living together, eating together, working together.”

Film shoots are often transient places, with actors and crew members working on set for a couple of days at a time before disappearing. “Whether on a film set or a building site, that’s a weird way to work. So if you can manage to get everyone in the same place for the whole time, it really, really helps – especially if you can all pile into the bar in the evening and have a pint together.”

Colin Firth confirms the togetherness. “There’s a particular vibe to the Lake District that we all felt. We were all tuned to the same frequency. We saw nobody but each other for six weeks. Stan and I were joined at the hip.”

It was the first time that New Yorker Tucci, a London resident for nearly a decade, had visited the Lakes. “I was in awe. We all stayed in these holiday homes on this little river, and even though it rained every day and kept getting colder and colder, to the point that it started to snow towards the end, I didn’t mind because I loved being there.”

STORY OVER SETTING

Macqueen, though, resisted the temptation of letting the landscape overwhelm the story. The Lakes are the film’s clear location, but they don’t steal any scenes. This is not an extended advert for the local tourist board.

“That was exactly the plan. Right from the start, we made sure we weren’t making a chocolate-box version of England that doesn’t really exist. The Lake District is obviously an incredible, awe-inspiring place, but it’s also brutal. ○



1

SEEN ON FILM *Visit these Supernova locations*

1 CRUMMOCK WATER

The scene set at this 2.5-mile long lake, just north of Buttermere, was shot in rare glorious weather. “We moved heaven and earth to get a sunny day to make that scene work,” explains Harry Macqueen. Owned by the National Trust, it’s a great spot for bluebells, waterfalls and lakeside wanders. nationaltrust.org.uk/buttermere-valley/features/crummock-water

2 CAFÉ SIXTY SIX

In the film, one of Tusker and Sam’s earliest stops is at this roadside diner, found, as its name suggests, on the A66 as it traverses Ketland Moor near Appleby-in-Westmorland. Stop for hearty breakfasts and warm up by the log-burner. **01768 351467**

3 HONISTER PASS

The Cumbrian scenery is rarely more dramatic than on this narrow, steep



2

B-road that connects the valleys of Buttermere and Borrowdale. In the enormity of this landscape, Tusker and Sam’s campervan looks like a Matchbox toy.

4 THE COTTAGE

Tusker and Sam’s final destination is a Grade II-listed farmhouse called The Dash. Located in splendid isolation on the eastern side of Skiddaw Mountain, it is available to hire; sleeps six. thedash.co.uk



3



4

“The Lake District is obviously an incredible, awe-inspiring place, but it’s also brutal. That’s what’s beautiful about it”

That’s what’s beautiful about it. It’s bleak and it’s raw and it’s elemental. And that increases the drama.”

The widescreen vistas of the location are certainly an excellent counterpoint to the claustrophobia of the campervan. “It’s the micro and the macro,” agrees Macqueen. “It’s placing a little microcosmic story in a vast landscape.” There’s an even greater dimension at play, too. The film’s title is a nod both to Tusker’s bright-burning life and to him teaching Sam about the night sky whenever they park the campervan up after dark.

RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

Poetically dreaming about the cosmos was in sharp contrast to the more prosaic demands of the shoot itself, however. The Lake District isn’t naturally built for the needs of big-budget film-making, despite Macqueen’s desire “to shoot it as authentically as possible. Colin was actually driving the campervan on live roads.”

That wasn’t the half of it. It’s one thing trying to get one of your leading lights to manoeuvre a chunky campervan along narrow mountain passes. It’s quite another trying to guide an entire film unit to various locations, some of which were as remote as could be. Stories of vehicles sliding off roads abound. The challenges weren’t just topographical. They were meteorological as well. Damp weather was near-constant. Ironically, the one scene set in a heavy downpour was filmed when the weather gods had eventually turned the taps off. A rain machine was quickly hired. “The weather was absolutely not in our favour throughout. But you get what you ask for if you want to make a movie about a road trip in Britain in September and October...”

Not that the experience has remotely dampened this film-maker’s aspirations. Having covered Cornwall and the Lakes, where next on Macqueen’s map? “There’s a lot of Scotland that I’ve not explored and I’d love to make something up there, possibly coastal.” His eyes sparkle. “I’ve got the germ of an idea...” **CF**

Supernova will be showing in cinemas from 9 July.



Nige Tassell is a journalist and author who writes about popular culture and sport.



ON LOCATION

Five more films where the British landscape plays a starring role

A **WITHNAIL AND I**

“What good’s the country?” sniffs Richard E Grant’s Withnail before the titular pair of out-of-work actors escape their Camden hovel for a cottage in the Lake District in this 1987 black comedy. The wild Cumbrian weather is far from welcoming. “We’ve gone on holiday by mistake...”

B **THE GO-BETWEEN**

A long hot August in Victorian Norfolk is the setting for the 1971 film version of LP Hartley’s classic novel. Endless summer meadows and grasslands provide the backdrop for this symbolism-heavy story of repressed and doomed forbidden love, starring Julie Christie.

C **LOCAL HERO**

Set in the fictional village of Ferness on the west coast of Scotland, Bill Forsyth’s much-cherished 1983 film features idyllic coastal shots at every turn. The plot is all about the landscape: whether the locals will permit a Texan oil company to build a refinery there. Nature ultimately prevails.

D **THE ENGLISHMAN WHO WENT UP A HILL BUT CAME DOWN A MOUNTAIN**

Again, the plot of this 1995 Hugh Grant film pivots on its setting’s geography. Grant plays an English cartographer who travels to the Welsh village of Ffynnon Garw to measure the sizeable promontory that dominates the local landscape.

E **KES**

Although set in the mining town of Barnsley in Yorkshire, this wonderful tale of a boy and his pet kestrel – released in 1969 and directed by Ken Loach – largely takes place in the glorious countryside at its edges. Fifteen-year-old Billy Casper finds a freedom and expression in nature in marked contrast to his destiny working down the pit.

OUR NATIONAL PARK HEROES

This year's Park Protector Awards celebrate the people and organisations who have helped safeguard Britain's national parks in the most challenging of times. **Laura Williams** reveals the winners

From Loughrigg Terrace, a blanket of bluebells rolls down towards glistening Grasmere, a popular spring spectacle in the Lake District National Park

An innovative live car park monitoring system, nature activity packs distributed via food banks and a ‘Bogtastic’ van are just some of the initiatives that have helped people connect with and protect our national parks in what has been a very challenging year.

These incredible efforts have this month been recognised as part of Campaign for National Park’s (CNP) Park Protector Awards, seeking to reward innovation and agility in the face of a global pandemic.

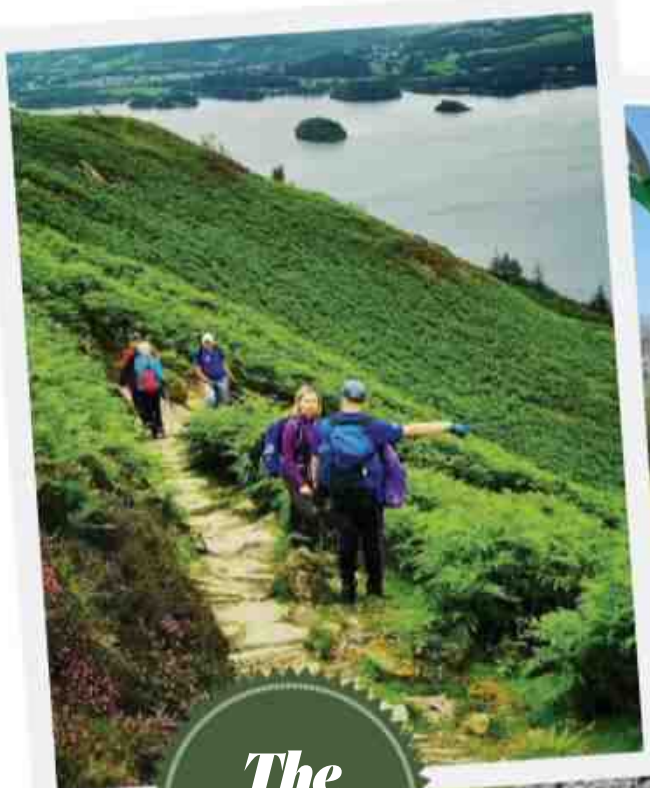
Every national park in England and Wales saw a huge increase in visitor numbers between lockdowns. They all faced similar challenges: how to manage this demand while protecting the landscape and local communities and adhering to Government guidance to restrict the spread of the pandemic. There was an added dimension of how to engage with new visitors, many of whom hadn’t been to a national park before. For most national park authorities, a single initiative wasn’t enough – it was the huge co-ordinated effort by the Lake District National Park team, with its ‘Safer Lakes’ campaign, that saw it win the Park Protector Award 2021.

THE WINNER

SAFER LAKES, LAKE DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK

As a national park that usually welcomes around 19 million visitors a year, the Lake District had the potential to hit the headlines during the pandemic for all the wrong reasons. But, thanks to the amazing efforts of the park’s team, it avoided major issues.

When the first lockdown ended, the Lake District – like every national park – saw unprecedented numbers of visitors. The Safer Lakes approach took partnership working to the next level in order to keep visitors and communities safe and protect the park from environmental damage. What started as a website to share real-time information about facilities, such as car parks, soon evolved into a transformative approach to caring for the park during the pandemic.



The winner!



ABOVE Safer Lakes recruited a team of new volunteer ‘welcome hosts’ who also picked up litter

The team launched new communication channels, including a WhatsApp group that involved representatives from the National Park Authority and other landowners, such as National Trust, volunteers and emergency services. This enabled multi-agency teams to act at speed to put out fires, tackle illegal camping and respond to local concerns. On the busiest days, some 1,000 messages dropped into the group.

Tony Watson, head of visitor services and communications at Lake District

outdoor space and is now being used by other authorities.

Kerry Powell, director of communications and resources at Lake District National Park, says: “Safer Lakes enabled millions of visitors to enjoy their visit safely, providing advance information on where to go, what to do, and help people avoid busy areas with provision of more than 1,000 additional parking spaces, alleviating community pressure and allowing more people to

enjoy the park. It engaged a new team of volunteer welcome hosts on the ground, engaging with people to reduce parking issues and excess litter. When litter was an issue, they helped clean it up. The scale of the multi-agency working is unprecedented

for a rural landscape,” adds Powell. “Together we are stronger and our landscape is safer, and that’s what Safer Lakes is all about. What started as a community response will become a permanent way of working.”

“The Safer Lakes’ legacy will outlive the pandemic,” affirms CNP chief executive Anita Konrad, “with new ways of working established, new volunteers engaged and new innovative technology solutions adopted. It’s something other national parks can and will learn, with its impact extending far beyond the Lakes.”

“Together we’re stronger and our landscape is safer; that’s what Safer Lakes is all about”

National Park says: “It became the neighbourhood watch scheme for the national park: people were telling us ‘the car park is busy’, ‘tree being attacked’ or ‘fire on an island’. We mobilised a ‘doing team’ with police, firefighters, our rangers and National Trust rangers. “We moved from an ‘army of grannies’ – they call themselves that! – monitoring car parks to solar-panelled cameras monitoring car parks and relaying information to visitors via the website.”

The system was picked up by the Government as a good way to manage

The Moors for the Future Partnership has planted sphagnum mosses on Peak District moorlands to stabilise bare peat and create active blanket bogs



RUNNER-UP

MOORS FOR THE FUTURE PARTNERSHIP, PEAK DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK

Despite the challenges of 2020, which included snow and harsh weather on top of coronavirus restrictions, the Moors for the Future Partnership has carried out more than £5m of peatland restoration works on the Peak District and South Pennine moorlands, creating active blanket bogs after years of decline.

Working in partnership with the Environment Agency, National Trust, RSPB, Severn Trent, United Utilities, Yorkshire Water, Pennine Prospects

and representatives of the moorland owner and farming community, the Peak District National Park Authority-led initiative, launched with Heritage Lottery funding in 2003, has been having a big impact on the health of the moorland. Through revegetating bare peat and raising the water table, their work is improving carbon capture and boosting biodiversity, benefitting wildlife, as well as reducing the risk of flooding and wildfire and improving local water quality. The partnership's 'Bogtastic' van also heads into villages and towns surrounding the Peak District to engage local people with the conservation work on the moors.

RUNNER-UP

BE WILD BUCKFASTLEIGH, DARTMOOR NATIONAL PARK

Engaging local people with nature is at the heart of what Be Wild Buckfastleigh does. The community project pivoted its efforts online during the pandemic to ensure the local community remained as connected with the surrounding nature and wildlife as possible.

From hosting a bat day, painting nest boxes (right), offering free socially distanced guided and self-guided bat walks and distributing hundreds of informative guides, Be Wild Buckfastleigh helped connect local families with the town's resident wildlife. Hundreds of activity packs were distributed via food banks and churches, containing items such as



flower presses, magnifying glasses and pine-cone hedgehogs to encourage creativity while educating families about nature and wildlife in a fun way.

They also worked with some of those local people most impacted by the pandemic, such as residents of nursing homes and older people living alone.



VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR

ROD GENTRY, SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

The Park Protector Awards Volunteer of the Year was decided by a public vote, with Forestry England volunteer warden Rod Gentry (above) securing the top spot. Rod won a walking holiday in the Lake District, courtesy of Ramblers Worldwide Holidays. But it wasn't just for his efforts patrolling one of the South Downs National Park's forests, but for the way he nurtured an online community during the pandemic via the Friends of Friston Forest's Facebook page. Rod has been volunteering as a warden since he moved to Friston Forest five years ago. He set up the Facebook page a year later and now oversees a growing community of more than 2,000 people.

Community ranger Jadie Baker, who nominated Rod, says: "Over the past year the number of visitors to the forest has been rising, and Rod has been instrumental in helping to balance the needs of the visitor and the needs of the forest. In managing the Facebook page, Rod has fostered a sense of community among its diverse user groups. The horseriders, the dog walkers, the runners, the cyclists all find a place they can have a voice and through Rod carefully mediating the chat to keep it local and relevant, people find a common ground: a shared respect for the forest and national park.

"Lots of small campaigns around littering, illegal camping, fires and dangerous parking have made the forest safer and cleaner," Jadie adds. "The public became the eyes and ears of the forest – hundreds of virtual woodland wardens all connected in one place."



Laura Williams is a West Country-based freelance journalist who also works part-time for environmental charities.

WALKING GUIDE

The mellow landscape of late spring offers wonderful walking – but whether you are going for a day-trip or a week’s adventure, it pays to be prepared. Turn the page for inspiration on planning the perfect holiday, as well as the must-have essentials to take along with you.



ESCAPE THE EVERYDAY

Discover beautiful Britain on an Inntravel *Slow Holiday*

Which corners of the UK have you always dreamed of visiting? Coastal Northumberland, with its vast sweeping beaches and castles that rise from the dunes? North Norfolk, where the salt marshes teem with birdlife and inland there are exquisite medieval churches and vast landed estates? Or perhaps the Scottish Borders, whose bucolic river valleys are steeped in local history?

Slow Travel specialists Inntravel believe this summer is all about celebrating the glorious British countryside, and they have launched a new collection of UK walking holidays which enable you to do just that.

These walking holidays are not about long days and challenging peaks; rather, they're about the views, the wildlife, the culture and the people. They are self-guided holidays for individuals, so you don't join a group, but instead let Inntravel's detailed route notes guide you away from the everyday to discover beautiful scenery and fascinating places. And as the holidays run to no-one's timetable but your own, they help you to recharge, re-energise, and feel refreshed.

Here we bring you three holidays from Inntravel's latest UK collection; plus Inntravel are giving you the chance to **win a 4-night break for two** – read on to find out more.



The Northumberland Coast & its Castles

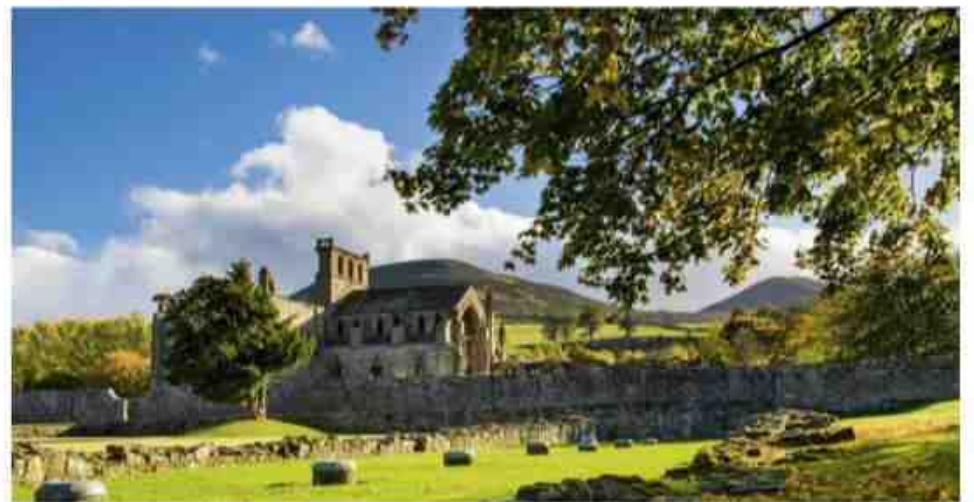
Combining superb walking along the coast with scenic countryside trails, this leisurely break showcases the best of Northumberland. As the name of the holiday suggests, there's no shortage of impressive castles to visit – among them imposing Warkworth, magnificent Alnwick and the romantically ruined Dunstanburgh – but there are also shimmering bays to admire, thriving fishing villages to explore and three wonderfully friendly places to stay. From your final base – a beautiful boutique hotel close to Seahouses – you have the opportunity to enjoy a wildlife-spotting boat trip to the Farne Islands, renowned for their inquisitive seals and incredible seabird colonies.





Seascapes of North Norfolk

Top-notch accommodation and outstanding food are two of the recurring themes on Inntravel's relaxed exploration of North Norfolk. Another is the astonishing variety of scenery: both on the coast where huge sandy beaches give way to salt marshes, tidal creeks and idyllic harbours of bobbing boats; and farther inland, where sleepy villages of flint-faced cottages are presided over by medieval churches and linked by a network of well-waymarked paths. Inntravel's route begins close to Sandringham in pretty Snettisham, and leads via teeming nature reserves and the sprawling Holkham Hall estate to Blakeney, one of the most charming villages on the North Norfolk coast.



The Tweed & the Scottish Borders

The most northerly of Inntravel's UK walks takes place amid the bucolic landscapes of the Scottish Borders. The terrain is gentle – all sheep-grazed pastures and low, rolling hills – but the history is anything but: the Borders were once fiercely disputed territory, as the many fortified tower houses and exquisitely ruined abbeys attest. Staying in charming, 4-star accommodation, you follow the River Tweed as it tumbles downstream, pausing in the traditional towns of Peebles and Innerleithen before ending in pretty Melrose. Highlights include the chance to spot local wildlife and to visit Abbotsford House, the magnificent former home of Sir Walter Scott.



Competition – Win a walking break for two!

We are giving you the chance to win the 4-night version of Inntravel's Scottish Borders walk. To enter, simply head to www.inntravel.co.uk/borders, where full details are available, including the all-important terms and conditions.

Inntravel are looking forward to hearing from you:
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©Aerial Cornwall

CAT HOLE COTTAGES

Cat Hole Cottages offers 24 cottages, from cosy cottages for a romantic break for two, to spacious homes for families or friends. Stone-built, the cottages benefit from luxurious modern amenities and decor, combined with traditional Dales character, either in rural isolation, or just steps away from a welcoming pub. Many are dog-friendly and all are within Swaledale or Arkengarthdale, on the route of the 2014 Tour de France. The Pennine Way and Coast to Coast Walk are on the doorstep, with many gentler rambles direct from the cottages. The magnificent landscape is perfect for exploring, hiking or cycling, with the bonus of returning home to a delightful, comfortable cottage, where you can relax and admire the stunning scenery.

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Carbis Bay Holidays offers a collection of stylish self-catering accommodation exclusively in Carbis Bay and St Ives. Specialising in self-catering, with holiday homes ranging from penthouse apartments overlooking the white-sand beaches of St Ives, to designer family coastal escapes a pebble's throw from the sea.

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Explore Cornwall's coast paths at carbisbayholidays.co.uk/st-ives-blog/five-coastal-walks-near-st-ives. Discover your ideal holiday home on the website.

carbisbayholidays.co.uk





Men's Bentu waterproof System £210

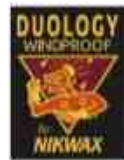
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"As a keen Nordic walker and hill climber who gets hot and sweaty as soon as I get moving, most outdoor gear has been uncomfortable. I bought the Bentu Fleece and Windproof Jackets and have found the perfect system. So light and versatile."

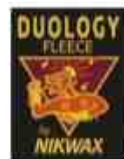
David Probert

CLOTHING FOR CHANGING CLIMATES

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The inner garment is a Nikwax Duology Fleece, also treated with a Nikwax PFC-free DWR, providing insulation which directs and keeps moisture away from the body.

By combining garments, the Bentu Duology waterproof system from Páramo provides protection with less weight whilst nature watching, hiking and hillwalking.

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May

Great days out

www.countryfile.com/walks

COVID-19

Please abide by Government advice on travel. The information on these pages is meant to assist you once restrictions have been lifted.

MAGNIFICENT MEADOWS

Swathes of pinks, reds and brilliant yellows begin to envelop our meadowlands in late spring – we look at some of the very best places in Britain to experience this floral spectacle



The grounds of Hever Castle in Kent have been planted with meadow flowers in order to improve biodiversity while also creating a glorious display of colour (page 90)

IN ASSOCIATION WITH



CONTENTS

Your handy guide to this month's Great Days Out



KING OF MEADOWS

Kingcombe Meadows

Dorset, p78

HEBRIDEAN MACHAIR

South Uist

Outer Hebrides, p82

DOWN DREAMLAND

Whitehill Down

Carmarthenshire, p84

TECHNICOLOURED HOLLOW

Hills and Holes

Cambridgeshire, p85

FLOWERS AND FELS

Littondale

North Yorkshire, p86

PARADISE HILLS

Pentwyn Farm

Monmouthshire, p88

SNAKES IN THE GRASS

Magdalen College

Oxfordshire, p89

PENNINE PASTURES

Weardale

County Durham, p89

CASTLE IN COLOUR

Hever Castle

Kent, p90

MEADOW CAMPSITES

Top seven

Nationwide, p92

WALK: Kingcombe Meadows, Dorset

KING OF THE MEADOWS

Dixie Wills delves into the complex, magical and deeply fragile world of meadows, before visiting one of Britain's most impressive examples, hidden away in a quiet corner of the Dorset countryside

There's nothing quite like wandering through a meadow in late spring or summer, is there? When the grass is vivid with the bright colours of cheerful wildflowers, the butterflies career riotously about our knees, and the bees buzz on their blossom-hopping way, all seems at once right with the world.

Shakespeare certainly thought so, writing of the joys of the meadow in *Love's Labour's Lost*:

When daisies pied and violets blue

And lady smocks all silver white

And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue

Do paint the meadows with delight

And while we may typically imagine a hay meadow when we think of the term, the actual definition is somewhat broader

than that. Renowned ecologist and author George Peterken helpfully defines the meadow as "flower-rich grassland of all kinds, whether it has been mown, grazed, or both".

MILLENNIA OF MEADOWS

Aside from being extremely pleasing to our senses, the

"MEADOWS HAVE AIDED THE EVOLUTION OF NUMBERLESS SPECIES"

nation's meadows boast a long pedigree. They have been six millennia in the making and have aided in the evolution of numberless species. Today, they sustain a huge variety of plants that help form an ecosystem, supporting birds, invertebrates, mammals and fungi.

FRAGILE GRASSLANDS

However, all is certainly not well with the health of our meadows. Once an intrinsic part of the British countryside, their decline since the 1930s has been staggering. According to the British conservation charity Plantlife: "Inadequate protection, changing farming

practices and a lack of public awareness has caused 97% (7.5 million acres) to be lost in less than a century.

Meadows and other species-rich grasslands now cover less than 1% of the UK."

Worse still, around three-quarters of our remaining species-rich grasslands are small parcels of ground that are susceptible to destruction. This is not only a disaster in terms of habitat loss but also



MAY

In the latter part of May, keep your eyes peeled for the marsh fritillary with its stunning orange and brown 'stained-glass window' markings – it's one of Britain's rarest butterflies.



JUNE

Come June, the intricate bee orchid makes its appearance. The flower has evolved to bear a remarkable resemblance to a female bee, attracting male bees who unwittingly help pollinate it.



JULY

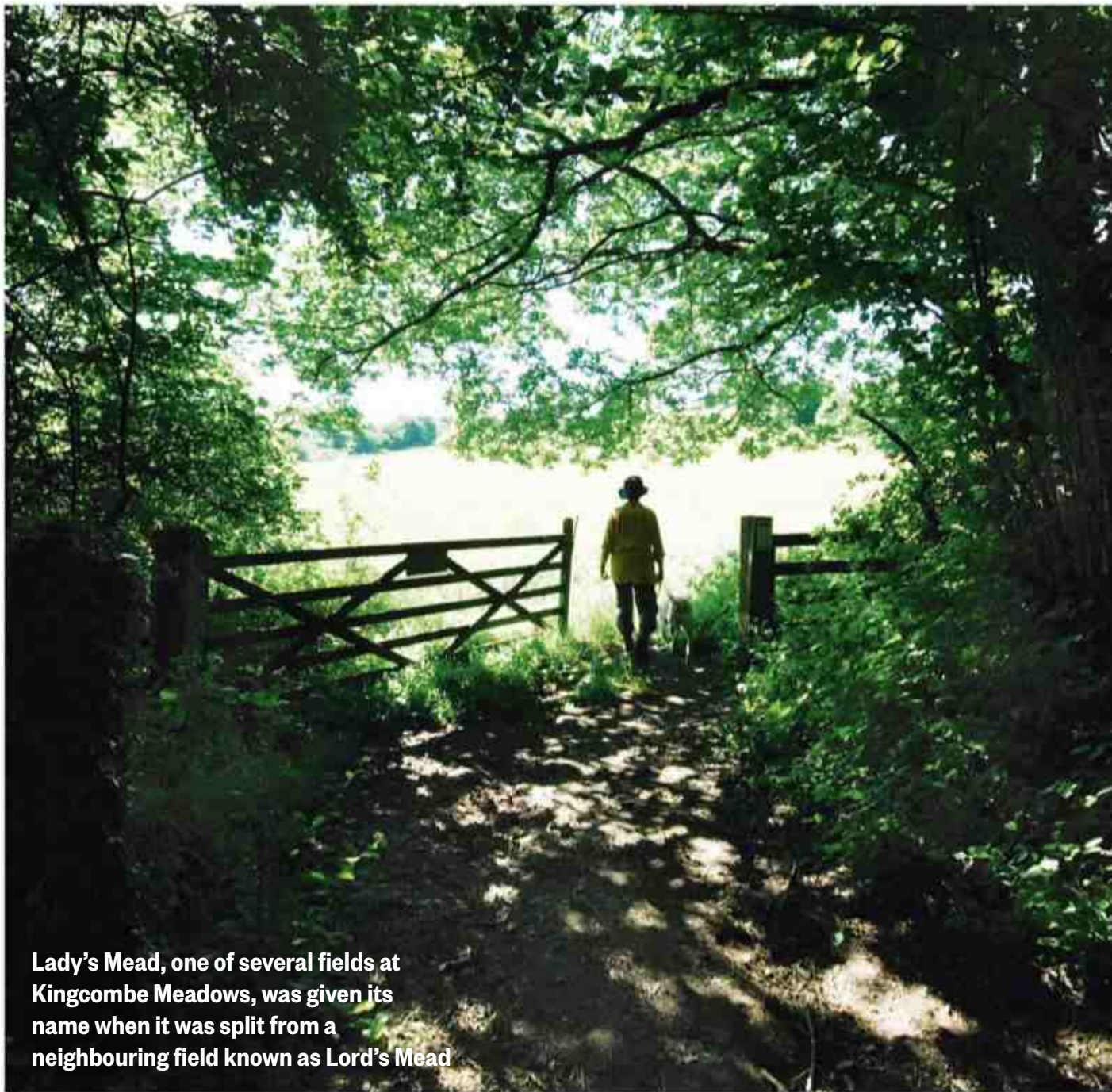
As dusk draws on in the warm days of July, Kingcombe's barn owls glide like ghosts on the breeze, hunting the mice and voles that scurry about the long meadow grasses.

star species

As well as being directly beneficial to wildlife, meadows such as these at Kingcombe are also important for storing carbon and retaining water, thus reducing flood risk



Photos: Getty, Alamy



Lady's Mead, one of several fields at Kingcombe Meadows, was given its name when it was split from a neighbouring field known as Lord's Mead

TYPES OF MEADOWS

Meadows come in many forms. Plantlife's botanical specialist Dr Trevor Dines has divided them into six simple categories:

DRY ACIDIC GRASSLAND

Mainly found in warm, dry, lowland areas, often with sandy soils.

CHALK DOWNLAND

Often found in the South Downs and home to a huge variety of wildflower species.

LOWLAND FLOODPLAIN

Where seasonal river flooding produces deeper soils.

LOWLAND NEUTRAL HAY MEADOW

Well-drained areas, often rich with orchids.

UPLAND HAY MEADOW

The lowland neutral meadow's loftier and much rarer counterpart.

RUSH AND PURPLE MOOR-GRASS PASTURE

Prevalent in the wetter western part of Britain.

signals the demise of an important element of the nation's heritage. It's vital therefore that we support organisations such as the Wildlife Trusts and Plantlife, who are attempting to restore meadows around the country.

DOWN IN DORSET

It's also important that we learn to cherish the meadows we still have, and one of the most glorious and diverse examples can be found in a secluded fold in the west Dorset countryside. Managed by the Dorset Wildlife Trust (DWT), Kingcombe Meadows covers 189 hectares – that's more than 250 football pitches – and spans the valley of the secretive River Hooke.

The Trust has maintained the land as a working farm using the traditions of times

past. This means that the greensward is grazed by sheep and cattle but is free from artificial fertilisers or pesticides. Accordingly, Kingcombe teems with

“KINGCOMBE MEADOWS IS A CORNUCOPIA OF NATURAL DELIGHTS IN SPRING AND SUMMER”

meadow flowers, as would have been the norm on pastureland before the advent of modern farming techniques. As a bonus, the topography of the land has produced several different kinds of meadow.

The fields are divided by good, thick hedgerows and by

sunken green lanes that for centuries resounded to the measured trundle of horse and cart. Meanwhile, a series of ponds, coppices and the River Hooke provide further

habitats for all manner of wildlife. The result is a cornucopia of natural delights, particularly in spring and summer.

HAZELS AND DAMSELS

In May, the beguiling hazel dormouse emerges from its five-month hibernation in Kingcombe's hedges. Increasingly rare in England due to loss of habitat, the little rodent – whose body measures a trifling 8cm – tends to stay off

the ground, dining on beech, hazel or chestnut. It's also nocturnal, so your best chances of seeing one during the day are at dawn or dusk.

Down on the River Hooke, look for a damselfly aptly named beautiful demoiselle – on the wing between May and August. Females are green and brown while males have dark wings with striking metallic blue-green bodies.

As summer gets into full swing, the meadow flowers are visited by billows of butterflies, with meadow browns, ringlets and marbled whites to the fore.

Cast your eyes up above them and you might see yellowhammers and linnets. With his pink forehead and chest, the male linnet is a pleasingly recognisable finch. With a particular fondness for

THE ROUTE

2 MILES/3.3KM | 1.5 HOURS | EASY

IN ASSOCIATION WITH




good stout hedging and a need for a plentiful supply of seeds all year round, Kingcombe makes an ideal home.

WALKING AT KINGCOMBE

There are two waymarked circular walking routes through the reserve. June and July are the best months for flowers, the latter bringing a wealth of purple as knapweed and betony burst forth. Both routes start by the excellent visitor centre and café (kingcombe.org), beside which there's an extensive outdoor 'exploration area' suitable for mobility scooters when ground conditions permit.

1 NORTH OF THE RIVER

The longer path – around a mile – takes visitors along the floor of the valley and across

the Hooke, where neutral meadows and rush pasture are speckled with devil's bit scabious and sneezewort.

2 CHALKLANDS

Heading up through the reserve's chalky hay meadows, the way is girded with cowslips, pyramidal orchids and bee orchids, before its return down the ancient Wessex Ridgeway.

3 FURTHER AFIELD

Back at the visitor centre, take the shorter path to climb Kingcombe's southern slopes. This is acid grassland territory where you'll find tormentil, heath spotted orchid and the curiously named corky-fruited water-dropwort.

There's open access over much of the reserve for visitors who want to explore further.

And if you fancy an even longer walk, you can carry on to the adjacent Powerstock Common. Also managed by the DWT, it offers partial access for off-road wheelchairs, a nature trail and, naturally, glorious meadows.

How to find a meadow near you

The Wildlife Trusts has an excellent meadow-finding tool on its website (wildlifetrusts.org); while Plantlife (plantlife.org.uk) manages 17 thriving meadows. The Coronation Meadows project (coronationmeadows.org.uk), the Save Our Magnificent Meadows campaign (magnificentmeadows.org.uk) and the National Trust (nationaltrust.org.uk) are also good starting places.



Dixe Wills has written a series of best-selling books, including *The Wisdom of Nature*.

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3. The map will appear on your device, and off you go!

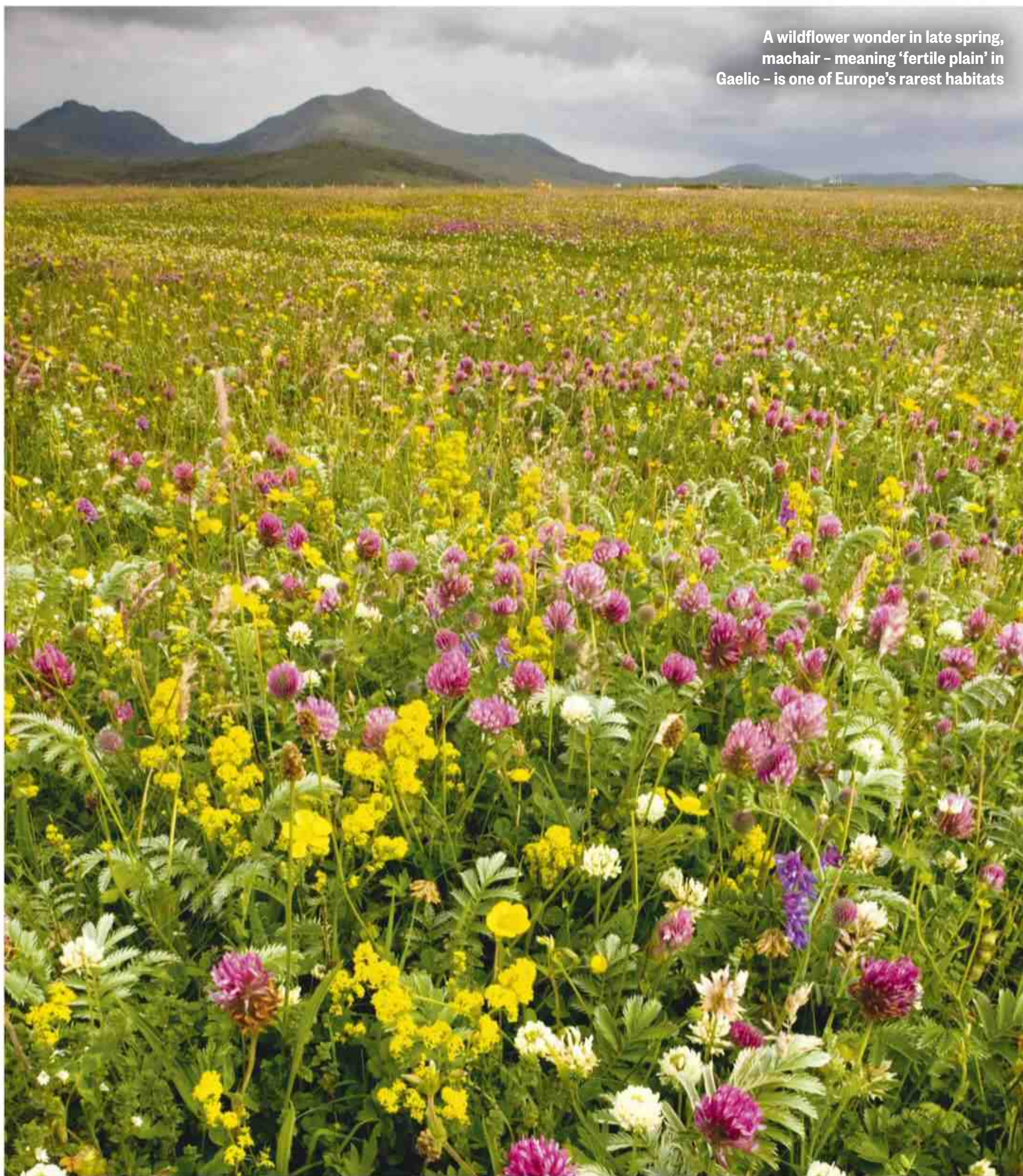
 Ordnance Survey

WALK: South Uist, Outer Hebrides

HEBRIDEAN MACHAIR

Scotland's Western Isles are a hotspot for the rare grassland habitat called machair, and one of the best examples can be found on the island of South Uist, discovers **Mark Rowe**

A wildflower wonder in late spring, machair – meaning 'fertile plain' in Gaelic – is one of Europe's rarest habitats



Photos: Alamy, Getty

Backing on to wild Atlantic beaches, the west coast of South Uist is a land of undulating flatness, where fields gently rise like the crests of waves, hiding the ocean until you are almost upon it.

As smooth and polished as a snooker table for much of the year, this landscape transforms into a riot of wildflowers as spring unfolds and blurs into summer. This is the land of the machair, the name given to the long strips of sea meadows and coastal grasslands so rich in flora that a square metre contains up to 45 species of wildflowers, from red and white clovers to vetches, eyebrights, harebells and frog orchids. To get the full visual impact, visit as late in spring as you are able to.

1 MOOR TO SHORE

A good way to really appreciate South Uist's machair is to take a 6.9-mile circular walk that begins on the adjacent moorland – from the lay-by on the B890 just over a mile east of the main A865.

The step-by-step transition between moor and machair is striking: the dark green of the loch shore, home to swans and golden plovers, gives way to the bright green of the machair where the sky in spring is full of lapwings and skylarks. Follow the signed Hebridean Way across Loch Druidibeg to the A865.

2 SHELL DUST

Cross and go straight ahead along the track towards Drimsdale House. Walk to the end of the paved lane and keep going along the track, with Drimsdale House and farm to your right. The machair is all around you.

Formed 3,000–4,000 years ago, machair is largely composed of tiny seashell fragments blown ashore on to the glacial soils. Even a light wind will lift some inland: it can resemble stardust in the sunlight, the grains seemingly emanating from an invisible wand. At the end of the lane, you'll see a purple waymarker post. Keep on ahead here, headed for the shore.

3 AIR OF MAGIC

At the coast, turn right (north), either along the sand or on the grassy banks above the beach. There's often a haunting liquid light and a crystalline air here, created by the reflections of freshwater lochs, a shallow sea and an absence of light pollution. You can feel short-changed if you don't see several bird species: the machair supports around a third of all the breeding dunlins and ringed plovers in Britain, as well as lapwings, redshanks and oystercatchers.

After about half a mile turn right (east) inland along the path to a meeting of paths. Turn left and walk north for about a mile with the Atlantic Ocean to your left and South Uist's numerous lochs to your right.

4 INLAND ONCE MORE

When you reach the next lane, turn right. Walk down the track past Groigearraidh and across the A865 past Hopewell Cottage and along the B890 – it's a very quiet road – for one and a half miles back to the small lay-by.



MAY BELTED BEAUTY

Look out for the stunning day-flying belted beauty, a moth whose chocolate tones and white streaks can often be seen on the machair.



JUNE CORNCRAKE

The Uist machair is a stronghold for this embattled bird, whose *crex-crex-crex* call can be heard on late spring or early summer evenings.



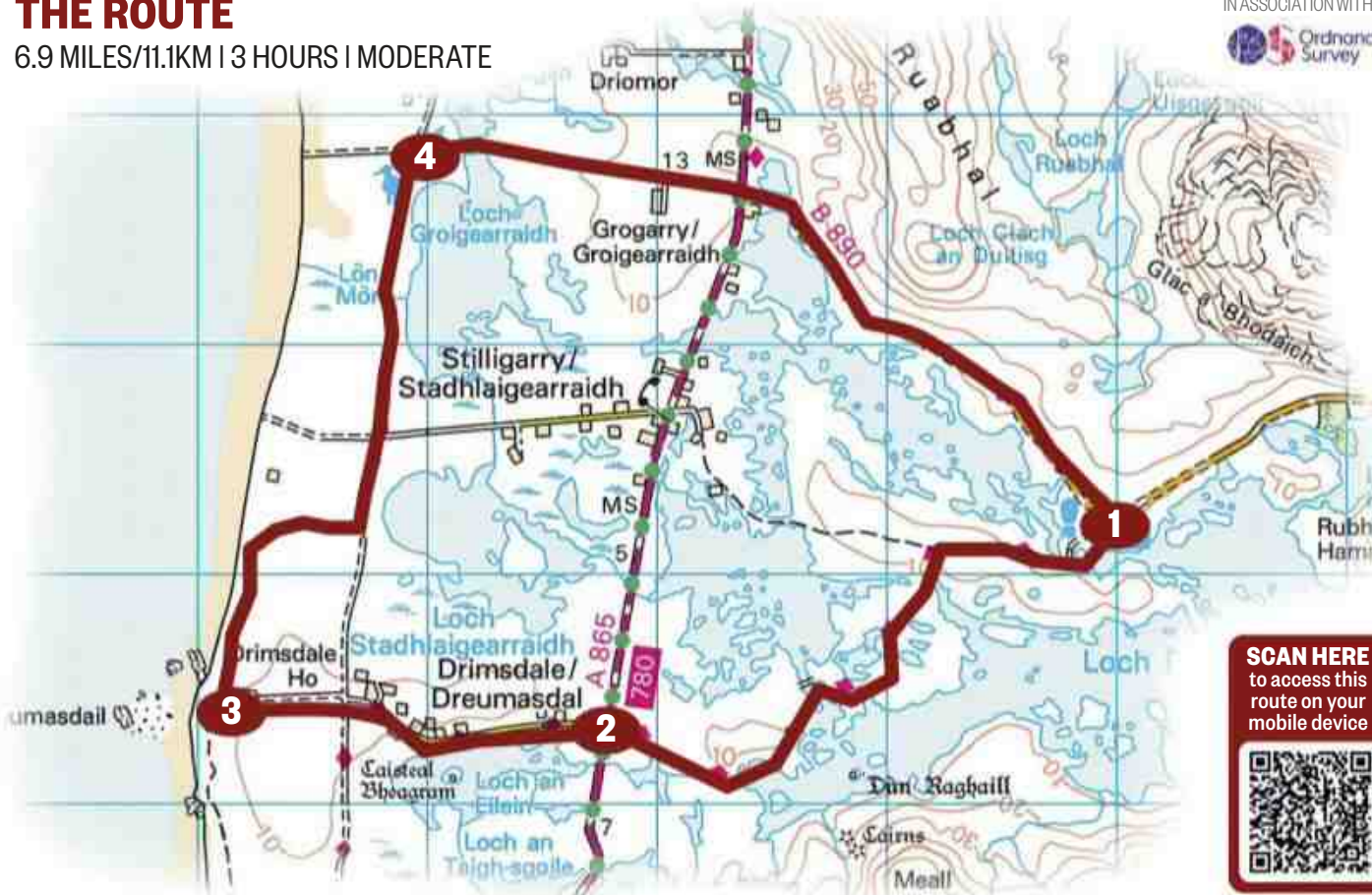
JULY NORTHERN MARSH ORCHID

These native orchids add a purple splash to the machair's kaleidoscope of colour.

THE ROUTE

6.9 MILES/11.1KM | 3 HOURS | MODERATE

IN ASSOCIATION WITH
Ordnance Survey



SCAN HERE to access this route on your mobile device



Mark Rowe is author of the *Outer Hebrides* guide by Bradt.

DAY OUT: Whitehill Down, Carmarthenshire

DOWN DREAMLAND

Julie Brominicks remembers a twilight walk through a little-known meadow in Wales, where orchids rise and bloom alongside great burnet, star sedge and swathes of yellow rattle



The 870-mile Wales Coast Path passes through the tree-enveloped meadowland of Whitehill Down

One May evening, already enchanted by hedgerows and estuarine coast, I ducked into Whitehill Down and was overwhelmed. The meadow was too glorious – an innate memory of something now so rare it was almost intangible.

But Whitehill Down is no dream. You'll find it sandwiched between the A477 and the Afon Tâf, halfway between Sanclêr (St Clears) and Lacharn (Laugharne). Drivers might miss it, but Wales Coast Path walkers will not – the path goes right through the down.

STRANGS AND BAULKS

Whitehill Down is a SSSI of ancient meadowland and marshy grassland with high

floral density that supports a richness of invertebrates, amphibians, mammals and birds – 176 species at the last count. Its administration, too, is historic. Although the Laugharne Corporation (established in 1291) is largely ceremonial these days, it still oversees civic suits and rights to cockle-beds, grazing and 'strangs' (strip-fields). Whitehill Down's strangs, divided by low earth baulks, are no longer cultivated, but they are still allocated to burgesses and managed as meadow in partnership with Natural Resources Wales.

BLOOMING GRASS

Whitehill Down shimmers. It invites your eyes to glide over its undulations, while its

soundscape caresses your ears – bird calls, gull mewls, hedge-muffled traffic, and the glorious droning of insects. Yellow rattle, Arctic eyebright and great burnet seethe in a flowering-grass sea, while star sedge, false fox-sedge and water pepper thrive on wetter soils and marsh where cattle dip their heads to drink.

Rosy twilight kisses the river, saturates the sky and doubles the meadow's tints. At dawn, buttercups are heavy with dew. Legs are slapped and boots plastered with precious seeds. The meadow is still here, real, not a thing of the past. At its wet margins, yellow iris spears cracks in the boardwalk, and orchids, like purple queens, sit crowned on their cushions of green.

MAY GREEN-WINGED ORCHID

With unspotted leaves, it has purple to pink flowers, and green veins on the sepal hoods.

JUNE LESSER BUTTERFLY ORCHID

Delicate white orchids with a greenish tinge that are fragrant at night.

JULY WHORLED CARAWAY

The white county flower of Sir Gaerfyrddin (Carmarthenshire) is named for how its leaves circle the stem.

star species



Julie Brominicks is a Snowdonia-based landscape writer and walker.

DAY OUT: Barnack Hills and Holes National Nature Reserve, Cambridgeshire

TECHNICOLOURED HOLLOWES

Did you know there is a rare species of orchid that looks like a tiny person? **Pam Vaughan** explores a characterful Cambridgeshire reserve in search of floral spring delights

star species

MAY PASQUEFLOWER

Rare, low-growing with feathery leaves and deep-purple, yellow-centred flowers followed by fluffy seed heads.

JUNE FRAGRANT ORCHID

Cylindrical spike of purple-pink flowers, 40cm tall with a sweet smell like oranges, especially in the evening.

JULY MARBLED WHITE BUTTERFLY

Distinctive black-and-white patterned wings. Lives on unimproved grassland and prefers feeding on purple-coloured flowers.



ABOVE Barnack Hills' wildflower-studded landscape offers insects a cornucopia of delights **INSET** Get up close to appreciate the anthropomorphic man orchid blooms

The name 'Hills and Holes' accurately describes this undulating national nature reserve. The area was a limestone quarry until the Middle Ages, hence the holes (or hollows), with piles of spoil and original ground level making the hills. Its unusual landscape forms a rare limestone habitat.

The thin, free-draining, alkaline soil supports an orchid-rich grassland; eight species are found here, including the early purple, bee, fragrant, pyramidal and frog orchids. The reserve is also home to the UK's largest population of the endangered

man orchid, its green-yellow flower resembling a tiny person with two arms and legs and a space-helmet-shaped head – rather like ET.

“THE ALKALINE SOIL SUPPORTS AN ORCHID-RICH GRASSLAND”

EASTER FLOWER

The site is famous, too, for the striking pasqueflower with its deep purple 'petals' and bright yellow central anthers. The name comes from 'Pasch', an old term for Easter, as the first pasque flowers were

traditionally seen on Good Friday. You may need to wander on the narrow,

steep stony paths, which stick to the hills, and look closely into the grassy hollows to

spot them. Once you see one – a quite exciting moment – you will then find yourself seeing them everywhere.

The hollows are alive with colour in May and on through summer, as harebells, purple milk-vetch, oxeye daisy, rock

rose, wild thyme, common dodder and many other flowers begin to bloom. Over 300 plant species have been recorded here, and this rich flora

supports a diverse insect population, especially butterflies, such as green-yellow brimstones, brown Argus, chalkhill blue, marbled white and green hairstreak. You may also spot the black and red day-flying burnet moth here.

Also, look out for red kites circling above you – there's a healthy local population of these impressive birds of prey.



Pam Vaughan

is a palaeontologist with a passion for nature.



Pen-y-Ghent viewed from Silverdale. Resembling a vast wave rising out of the sea, the fell stands at 694 metres and is the lowest of Yorkshire's Three Peaks

BIKE RIDE: Littondale, Yorkshire Dales

WILDFLOWERS AND FELLS

Paul Kirkwood pootles down quiet lanes, past upland hay meadows and alongside dramatic peaks in two of the least-visited Yorkshire Dales

Littondale and Silverdale are the real Yorkshire Dales, far away from the tourist honeypots, and you can't get much deeper into them than on this ride. Restored and traditionally managed meadows support a diversity of invertebrates, mammals and birds as well as up to 120 different species of plants and wildflowers, including eyebright, globe flower, melancholy thistle, hay rattle and wood cranesbill.

1 GIANT GREEN

Start at **Arncliffe**, notable for its giant meadow of a green, typical of many villages in

“FINE VIEWS ACROSS THE DEEP V-SHAPED VALLEY SET THE SCENE”

northern England. Such large, encircled and accessible areas of grass and wildflowers were a good place to drive livestock

when the menace of attack from the Scots was evident. Take the lane at the top of the village, heading south-

west. The undulations, peacefulness and fine view across the deep, v-shaped valley of

Cowside Beck set the scene for what is to come. At the first cattlegrid, you can spot a corner of Malham Tarn.

2 TARN TURN

To reach the tarn, fork left down a private road that becomes a rough track through a wood. Pass Tarn House, which was built as a shooting lodge and today is operated by the National Trust as a base for research and environmental education.

Emerge from the trees just past the boat house and take a rest overlooking the lake, the highest in England and the largest natural lake in Yorkshire. On a still day, this is a place of

spiritual tranquility. After the tarn, return to the road and keep ahead, following signs to **Settle**. You start playing a game of peek-a-boo with Pen-y-Ghent. The fell is unmissable at the top of a steep hill, disappears as you plunge downwards and then reappears above a drystone wall like a grand organ emerging from behind the stage in an old concert hall.

3 BEST VIEW

At a T-junction, turn right along Silverdale. The meadows looking left towards Pen-y-Ghent are the best of the ride. The most striking view, meanwhile, comes on the long, gentle descent to gorgeous **Halton Gill**, nestled deep in Littondale.

4 GENTLE FINALE

Turn left into the village for a break at Katie's Cuppas, a self-service café within a farm, or right over the bridge to continue direct. It's all easy going from here, cycling beside the River Skirfare. There's another refreshment stop at the Queen's Arms in **Litton**.



Paul Kirkwood is a cycling journalist who loves exploring by bike.



MAY SWIFT

The bird has a distinctive arrow shape and screaming call and is often seen swooping low to feed on flying insects.

JUNE BUFF-TAILED BUMBLEBEE

A large and common species. Queens have an obvious buff-coloured tail.

JULY YELLOW RATTLE

Seedpods rattle when ripe, traditionally signifying that the hay crop is ready to be cut.



ABOVE Surrounded by limestone cottages, Arncliffe village green is rich with wildflowers, including buttercups and knapweed, and was once used as pasture for livestock during threats of attack from the Scots

THE ROUTE

21.8 MILES/35.1 KM | 2.5-3 HOURS
MODERATE/CHALLENGING

IN ASSOCIATION WITH
Ordnance Survey



SCAN HERE
to access this route on your mobile device

DAY OUT: Pentwyn Farm, Penallt, Monmouthshire

PARADISE PASTURES

Neil Coates recalls an old family stomping ground, where wild orchids and golden buttercups grow amid graceful quaking grass on centuries-old farmland, high above the River Wye

Light grazing and a late-summer hay cut maintain the nutrient-poor soil needed for wildflowers to thrive at Pentwyn Farm



Vestiges of a distant era thrive at the rim of the Trellech Plateau, within the Wye Valley AONB just south of Monmouth. Here, in a deeply bucolic landscape peppered by hamlets and villages, lies Pentwyn Farm. Owned by Gwent Wildlife Trust, the 12-hectare traditional sheep and cattle farm is a SSSI, recognising the significance of its relict, species-rich fieldscape.

FLORAL PROFUSION

A jigsaw of irregular little hay meadows – a riot of colour throughout spring and summer – spills below secluded Penallt's cosy Bush Inn and handkerchief-sized village green. Beautiful, blowsy byes threaded by mellow

drystone walls slumber above the wooded depths of the Wye's cavernous gorge. On the farm's waymarked trail, the first thing to take the eye is the view across to the woodland domes of the Forest of Dean. At your feet, swathes of oxeye daisy, hawkbit, knapweed and yellow-rattle bloom profusely, while venerable hedge-banks glisten with stitchwort and glow with champions.

Notable here are many types of orchids that grow alongside common milkwort, delicate quaking-grass and showy bistort spikes. Over 80 species of flowering plant are found here – a rich food-source for bees and insects that, in turn, are food for summer's swallows and rare spotted flycatchers hunting from nearby Prisk Wood.

WYE WALK

It's best visited (free) between April and July; the meadows are then mown once seed has been set. The walking trail circles from the small parking area at Pentwyn's old barn, built in-part around a medieval holy well, wayside chapel and hospice. The paths are gently sloping; the pastures interlinked by hand gates.

Alternatively, there is a glorious three-mile circular walk – largely along quiet lanes and old railway – from Redbrook village, deep in the Wye's chasm. It's steep outwards; but ample rewards include intriguing industrial heritage and verges billowing with cow parsley, buttercups, foxgloves and meadowsweet. Visit wyevalleyaonb.org.uk to download a walk leaflet.

MAY COWSLIPS

Look out for the yellow, cup-shaped early-spring flowers of long-stalked cowslips.



JUNE ORCHIDS

Green-winged and greater butterfly orchids emerge through June and July, providing nectar for a panoply of butterflies and moths.

JULY BATS

Summer's dusk commonly finds several bat species feeding on Pentwyn's bountiful insects.



Neil Coates

is a Manchester-based writer specialising in walks and pubs.

DAY OUT: Magdalen College, Oxfordshire

SNAKES IN THE GRASS

Roly Smith finds solace and hope in a stroll through the fritillary meadows of Magdalen College, Oxford

In this time of frustrating Covid restrictions, it's good to read a hearteningly optimistic poem by CS Lewis marking the start of a walk through the famous fritillary meadows in the lovely grounds of Magdalen College in Oxford.

The poem contains the lines:

This year this year, as all these flowers foretell

We shall escape the circle and undo the spell.

Admired by poets and academics alike, the glorious display of deep-purple chequered fritillaries, daffodils and stitchworts in Magdalen

Meadows is unmatched anywhere in Britain, and at its best in late April to early May.

A small entrance fee is charged for access to the grounds for the one-mile walk, which takes its name from Joseph Addison, a fellow of the College from 1698 to 1711, who enjoyed walking there.

This flower-filled walk can easily be extended along the banks of the Thames or the Oxford Canal.



Roly Smith has written more than 90 books about walking and the countryside.

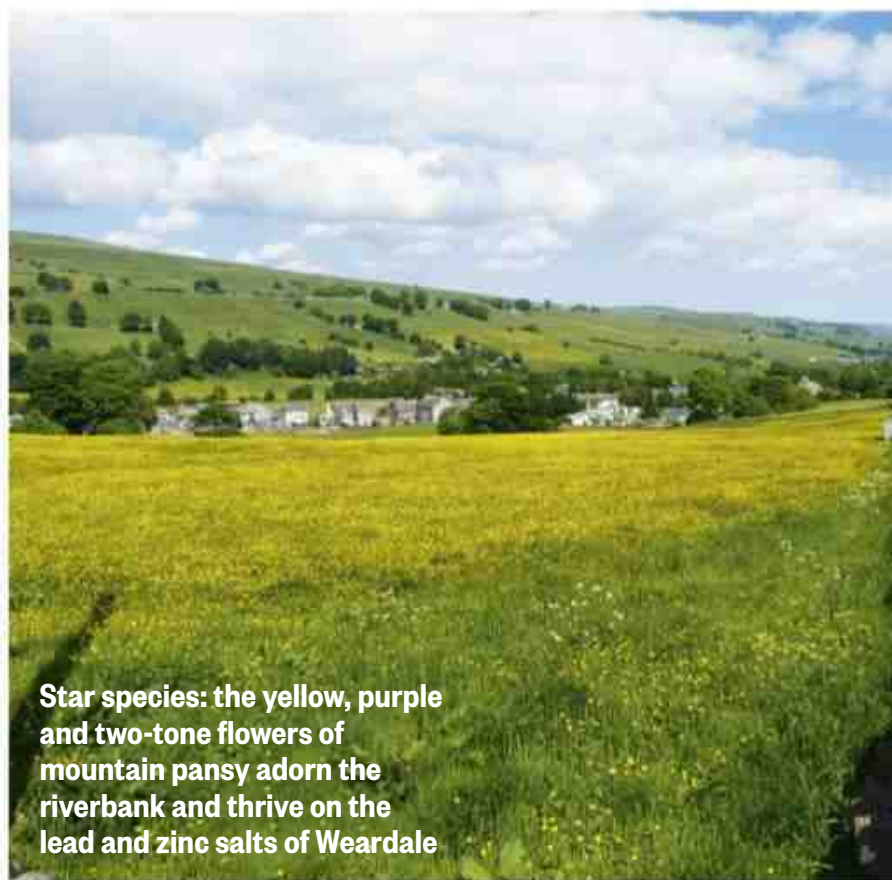
Star species: the snake's head fritillary (*Fritillaria meleagris*) gets its name from its dusky, chequered, reptilian-looking buds



DAY OUT: St John's Chapel and Ireshopeburn, County Durham

PENNINE PASTURELANDS

Anthony Toole wanders through the upland hay meadows of Weardale, arguably the most beautiful dale in the North Pennines



Star species: the yellow, purple and two-tone flowers of mountain pansy adorn the riverbank and thrive on the lead and zinc salts of Weardale

Weardale's scenery owes everything to geology. As the now-redundant lead mining industry filled the valley, it forced agriculture on to the hills, leading to a rare ecology of upland hay meadows that remain the spring and summer glory of the North Pennines.

Many of the flowers are species that tolerate the heavy metal salts leached out of the mine workings.

From St John's Chapel, a peaceful walk crosses the river and follows the footpath west through meadows and along the riverbank for a mile to

Coronation Bridge. Cross into Ireshopeburn and turn left to the Weardale Museum and High House Chapel. Ascend a rough track opposite to join a footpath that leads east through high meadows to a junction with Teesdale Road. Look and listen for ground-nesting curlews and lapwings that populate the fields in spring. Descend another track to reach a footpath that leads back into St John's Chapel.



Anthony Toole is a prize-winning outdoors writer who grew up in Cumbria.

DAY OUT: Hever Castle, Kent

CASTLE IN COLOUR

Hever Castle's jewel-coloured lakeside meadows are an inspiring addition, bringing joy to pollinators and gardeners alike, says **Sonya Patel Ellis**

When the young Anne Boleyn lived at Hever Castle, nestled within Kent Weald countryside in the River Eden valley, the landscape would have been mainly marshland and meadows.

When American millionaire William Waldorf Astor bought the property in July 1903, he reimagined the grounds of his 'Tudor village' as a series of beautiful gardens and walks, including a 38-acre lake that took 800 men to excavate.

Walk or golf by these tranquil waters in late spring and summer and the native grasses and wildflowers are still there, now further enhanced by a series of kaleidoscopic micro-meadows inspired by Nigel Dunnett and James Hitchmough's show-stopping wildflower designs for the 2012 Olympic Games. Created to bring joy to visitors and boost biodiversity at the same time, Hever's meadows are similarly polychromatic, focusing on pollinator-friendly species that bring long-lasting colour.

SEEDS TO FLOWERS

Follow 'Lake Walk' (around one hour) to stumble upon a swaying waterside rainbow of wildflowers and herbs, such as calendula, cornflower, cosmos and corn poppy. Pause at the grotto-like Anne of Cleves Bower House. Its formerly bramble-covered ruins were revealed by Hever Castle Golf Club's head greenkeeper Rob Peers when he began leading the meadow project in 2018.

Picnic beside pockets of crown daisy, larkspur, sweet William, mallow and perennial flax.

Many of these meadows can also be seen from the adjacent golf course, where Rob and his team are also upgrading areas of rough, using plants such as yellow rattle and 'finer grass'.

There are also annual and perennial wildflowers up at the Top Gate and around the Hever Shop, where you can buy a selection of Hever's seed mixes, seed shakers and a special mini meadow-growing mat, known as 'Flora Fleece', to help you grow your own. Visit in May to catch early summer colour and a glimpse of meadows being sown.

star species

MAY SWEET ALISON

(Lobularia maritima)
Come on a clear, still morning to enjoy the best of these honey-scented white blooms.

JUNE POPPIES (*Papaver rhoeas/* *Eschscholzia californica)* Midsummer meadows of red and orange poppies provide a feast for the eyes, as well as the bees and birds.

JULY COSMOS (*Cosmos bipinnatus)* Tall, candy-coloured, yellow-centred open blooms bring colour, nectar and pollen well into October.



Sonya Patel Ellis is a writer, author and artist. Her books include *Collins Botanical Bible* (2018).



Dotted along the banks of the lake, Hever Castle's vibrant micro-meadows cover an area of 4,500 square metres and are designed to provide colour right through to October

“STUMBLE UPON A SWAYING
WATERSIDE RAINBOW OF
FLOWERS AND HERBS, SUCH
AS COSMOS AND CORN POPPY”



TOP SEVEN MEADOW CAMPSITES

Pitch your tent at a site where wildlife is given free reign. **Sian Lewis** selects seven superb camping meadows



01 HARRY'S MEADOW, HAMPSHIRE

Welcome to Harry's, a sprawling 20-hectare wildflower meadow in the heart of the New Forest National Park that welcomes tents and campervans. A criss-cross of nearby public footpaths, including the waymarked Avon Valley Path, makes this a wonderful base for walking in ancient woods.

newforestcampsite.com/harrys-meadow



02 THE SUNNYFIELD, KENT

Get in quick – there are only 15 (huge) pitches available in this buttercup meadow on the North Downs. By day, follow the North Downs Way, which runs right past your tent, and lie back and watch for stars in the light pollution-free sky by night.

thesunnyfield.co.uk



03 BÔN CAMPING, PEMBROKESHIRE

Bôn asks arriving campers if they'd prefer a meadow pitch or a woodland pitch – both are part of a glorious 12-hectare nature reserve right on the Pembrokeshire coast. The site puts a big focus on rewilding the land, and regular campers recommend visiting in spring, when the meadow flowers bloom, or in autumn, when you can gorge on blackberries. bon-camping.cymru



04 FARRS MEADOW, DORSET

This hidden-away campsite feels wonderfully like going back in time. Campers are scattered across a bucolic tent-only meadow surrounded by shady woodland, and wild swimmers can also go for a morning dip in the River Stour, which runs right past the campsite.

farrsmeadow.co.uk

Photos: Alamy



05 LITTLE MEADOW, DEVON

The wide grassy terraces at this friendly campsite boast one of the loveliest views in Britain – each pitch looks out over boats bobbing in the blue waters of Combe Martin Bay in Ilfracombe. The site's namesake flower meadow is the perfect place for a picnic. littlemeadow.co.uk



06 CHAPEL HOUSE FARM, HEREFORDSHIRE

Just 12 wide pitches are carefully mowed out of two huge meadows at Chapel House Farm in the Welsh Marches, allowing wildlife and campers to live happily side by side. The upper meadow has views of tall Hay Bluff, and the farm shop sells home-grown goodies ideal for an evening barbecue.

chapelhousefarm.com



07 MEADOWS CAMPING, COUNTY TYRONE

Hikers will love this peaceful grassy meadow at the foot of the Sperrin mountains, which has myriad walks on the doorstep including the International Appalachian Trail. Campers can also fish in the river that flanks the main field. meadowscamping.co.uk



Sian Lewis is a Bristol-based travel journalist, writer, blogger and author of *The Girl Outdoors*.

Lazy days

BOOKS › TV › RADIO › PODCASTS › LETTERS › PUZZLES

Reviews editors: Margaret Bartlett, Maria Hodson



Anita Sethi found healing and a real connection with nature on her solo walks in the Pennines

COMFORT AND HEALING ON THE TRAIL

A powerful and moving memoir of one woman's search for belonging

BOOK

I BELONG HERE: A JOURNEY ALONG THE BACKBONE OF BRITAIN

BY ANITA SETHI, BLOOMSBURY, £16.99 (HB)



Anita Sethi is a Mancunian and woman of colour (the least-worst term available, she says) who grew up in a working-class family in the inner-city. While recovering from the trauma of a race-hate crime, she bravely embarks alone on a series of walks through the limestone landscapes of

northern England, from the Yorkshire Dales and Pennines to Hadrian's Wall. They form the heart of this painfully honest yet optimistic book, which combines travel writing, memoir and a search for healing and belonging.

There are many moving moments, as Sethi seeks comfort and kinship in the natural world. "Can you imagine a blade of grass having low self-esteem, being made to hate its colour or shape?" she asks. "Despite being so literally trod upon, it is so sure of itself, so confident in its skin. Be more like grass growing, I think."

Defiance surges through the pages, as

powerful as the rivers that Sethi tramps along. There is beauty too, as she encounters the kindness of strangers and connects to nature at an elemental level. The racial slurs that have been flung at her are shocking, but hope wins out.

Putting one boot in front of the other, through quaint villages and over mountain and moorland trails, becomes an act of protest, Sethi's way of saying that she, and single women everywhere, have the right to roam the British countryside safely and feel at home.

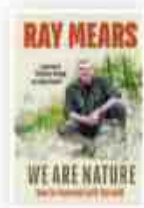
Ben Hoare, naturalist and author

• Anita Sethi writes in our next issue.

BOOK

**WE ARE NATURE:
HOW TO RECONNECT
WITH THE WILD**

BY RAY MEARS, EBURY PRESS, £20 (HB)



I really thought I was going to like *We Are Nature*, Ray Mears' distillation of what he has learned from a life lived in the great outdoors.

I've always preferred his TV work to that of the more in-yer-face bushcrafty presenters, and the book begins promisingly with an exploration of our senses and how to use them effectively. There's a nice anecdote of his experience with a desert Bedouin who could smell the coming rain, and some interesting advice about how to search for an animal that has fleetingly caught your attention by using your peripheral vision, which is better at detecting movement.

But I found his chapters on optical equipment and other gear rather laboured, while there's some highly detailed writing on stealth and stalking that could be summed up as "Keep quiet and stay low". Above all, Mears isn't very gracious about his superior knowledge. Several stories narrate how lesser mortals have failed to spot what he did, with more than a hint of astonishment at their lacklustre abilities.

Some useful information is slightly thrown away, but it's there if you look hard enough. Following a leopard in Namibia, Mears tells how he made an impression with his thumb beside some tracks in the dust to confirm his suspicion they were fresh. I'll be trying that next time I'm on the trail of the Gloucestershire panther!

James Fair, writer and naturalist

Velvet-horned immature red deer stags on Mar Lodge Estate in the Cairngorms National Park



BOOK

**REGENERATION: THE
RESCUE OF A WILD LAND**

BY ANDREW PAINTING, BIRLINN, £20 (HB)



To my shame, I have been to the Cairngorms only once. I walked in rich, dark forests and scrambled up snow-covered slopes; I saw black

grouse, mountain hares and golden eagles. Just a week in this landscape left a lasting impression. It's easy to believe this stunning part of Scotland is an untouched wilderness, but, in truth, it's been shaped by humans for centuries.

In *Regeneration*, Andrew Painting tells the story of Mar Lodge: a 30,000-hectare estate in the middle of the national park. When the National Trust for Scotland took over its management in 1995, its woods and moors were ecologically wrung-out. A quarter-century of ambitious restoration later and it exemplifies how conservation can

work in harmony with human interests.

The author, assistant ecologist at Mar Lodge, takes us tree-coring in the Caledonian pinewoods, deer stalking on the moors and to the mountains in search of summer snow. Along the way, complex environmental conundrums – including "the deer problem" and the emotionally charged issue of illegal raptor persecution – are objectively and intelligently explored. Painting's tone is companionable, humorous (he describes male black grouse as having "the haughty demeanour of a duke whose monocle has fallen into the soup tureen") and buoyant.

The Trust's work is not finished – the omnipresent cloud of climate change creates challenges and the current passion for rewilding offers opportunities – but when I next visit the Cairngorms, I'll do so with a deeper understanding and appreciation of its beauty.

Pete Dommett, nature writer

• See Andrew Painting's article, page 40.



Photo: Getty, BBC, George Torode

CATCH-UP TV

MY UNIQUE B&B

BBC TWO, AVAILABLE ON IPLAYER

Ever dreamed of running your own countryside B&B? You don't necessarily require a huge property to realise your ambition. This BBC Two series sees master carpenter and tree-house designer Simon Parfett and his team help people create unique accommodation by converting

broken-down vans, caravans and horse boxes into delightful weekend retreats.

In the first episode, the team travels to the Wye Valley to help George and Al transform an old campervan that has been left to rust in the quarry at the bottom of their garden. Turning it into an attractive B&B is no small feat – but with hard work and ingenuity, the results are impressive (left). Episode two sees new parents Bill and Cheryl enlist the team to revive a flatpack chalet in Herefordshire. 🐾

Q&A

PAUL EVANS: A POETIC SPIRIT

Words have the power to rewild our souls, says nature writer and broadcaster Paul Evans, editor of invigorating new collection *Poetry Rebellion*



Why have you created a collection of poetry “to rewild the spirit”?

I have been a writer, naturalist and conservationist all my life. I'm interested in rewilding as a cultural as well as an ecological concept and I've always thought literature was a way of connecting the soul to nature – that without a wilder human spirit we cannot hope for wilder ecosystems and address our crimes of ecocide.

How can poetry act as a form of rebellion?

Poetry can be a standing-up, an advocacy – it can confront and challenge, praise and condemn, as it has for thousands of years. More than ever we need poetry to bear witness and stand up to violence, prejudice, cruelty and wilful ignorance. Poetry is empowering and therefore dangerous.

What is ecophobia and how is it affecting us?

Ecophobia is the fear of nature's answering violence – to protect ourselves and our beliefs we retaliate against a potentially hostile nature to control it. But we have gone too far, for us and for nature. We're in the contradictory position of managing nature as a resource for us and fearful of its ability to wipe us out.

Your introduction was written at the start of the Covid pandemic.

Does poetry have the power to console us in times of crisis?

The virus is an example of nature adapting to our actions and although poetry can console and provide solace from environmental grief, it has, powerfully, the ability to inspire action, to rebel against those forces ranged against nature and the human spirit.

This collection spans centuries and continents. Did you have to make some difficult exclusions?

It was an agonising process deciding what to include and what to cut out – such a privilege but I still don't think I've got it right! I hope readers will see why some favourites are absent and some more obscure choices fit.

What is your favourite poem in the collection?

It changes all the time. It was Alan Ginsberg's *Sunflower Sutra* that got me started but I'm very fond of John Clare, Mary Webb, Li Po, Basho and the new young radicals.

Did nature help you during the recent lockdowns?

I am lucky to live in a beautiful corner of Shropshire and have been writing about local nature for nearly 30 years as a Guardian Country Diarist. As a naturalist immersing myself in nature, not least in a year like we've just had, my writing is a kind of advocacy. It comes from a robin singing behind the rain, owls hooting from the wood, a hare's tracks in the snow and the wind blowing fore and aft – small acts of resistance in the war against nature.



**POETRY REBELLION:
POEMS AND PROSE TO
REWILD THE SPIRIT,**
EDITED BY PAUL EVANS,
BATSFORD £12.99 (HB)

BOOK

A WALK FROM THE WILD EDGE

BY JAKE TYLER, MICHAEL JOSEPH, £16.99 (HB)



Outwardly, Jake Tyler had made a success of his first 30 years of life. So why was he overwhelmed by such a tsunami of stress,

depression and self-loathing that he came within a heartbeat of ending it all?

Rescued by his mother, Tyler recalls his happy outdoors childhood and hits upon the idea of immersing himself in nature as a possible remedy. And so begins a “3,000(ish)-mile” lap of Britain, covering every single national park and undertaken (almost) entirely on foot.

Similar in nature to Raynor Winn's *The Salt Path* – with its story of personal salvation wrought from an epic hike – this is a tale told with the same courageous honesty. On his first day, Tyler finds he's barely able to stagger 12 miles. Consumed by apprehension, he immediately realises he has “hugely underestimated the walk” and promptly goes on a drunken coke-fuelled bender.

Happily, things improve. The book is filled with the diverse landscapes he has the pleasure of tramping through and the seemingly bottomless well of kindness lavished on him by strangers. And though he experiences setbacks – including having belongings stolen, succumbing to further alcohol/drug binges and his depression returning – the healing process continues.

While few of us may need to embark on such an epic enterprise to recover our mental health, there's much to learn here about how walking, running, reconnecting with nature and trusting others can rekindle the joy of being alive.

Dixe Wills, travel writer and author



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Your countryside

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Have your say: *BBC Countryfile Magazine*, Eagle House, Colston Avenue, Bristol BS1 4ST; or email editor@countryfile.com, tweet us [@CountryfileMag](https://twitter.com/CountryfileMag) or via Facebook www.facebook.com/countryfilemagazine

*We reserve the right to edit correspondence.

FOND MEMORIES OF PARK LIFE

I want to say how much I enjoyed reading the article 'Treasure Hunting', photographed on Wanstead Flats, London, in your March issue.

As a child living in Stratford in the 1960s, I remember it as a day out for us all, walking among what seemed like lots of forest with streams to play in and endless sunshine. Although it wasn't that far from us, it was a way to walk with three young children, two in a pram and one on foot, so we very often used to make it no further than Wanstead Flats.

There were free-roaming steers and lots of blackberry bushes that we could pick fruit from in the autumn. There was also a large pond that had lots of goldfish in it; rumour had it that these had been set free from the fairground after the bank holiday visits when they hadn't been won from the various stalls. Best of all, in the winter of 1962-1963, the pond froze over and my Dad spent half a day pulling us around the pond on an old tyre. My Dad died early last year with coronavirus – the article brought back so many memories and lots of smiles, thank you.

Gillian Greening, via email

Author Sonya Patel Ellis replies:

It was a joy to read your letter and it actually brought a tear to my eye, so



Sonya Patel Ellis searches for natural treasures on Wanstead Flats, East London

thank you. I also take my children there since moving to Forest Gate over a decade ago and it really has been such a sanctuary during lockdown.

I don't think I'll ever forget how lucky we felt having this magical space just a walk or cycle ride away when it wasn't possible to travel any further. I loved it before, I love it even more now and never get tired of wandering across Wanstead Flats and circumnavigating the lakes through sun, rain, snow, ice and, right now, a lot of mud! I'm truly excited to hear the birds, spot spring wildflowers coming up and watch the ducks, Canada geese and swans get ready for bringing new life into the world.

COLLECTING NATURE

I was interested in Sonya Patel Ellis' feature 'Treasure Hunting' in the March issue as I too have been collecting treasures that I've found on beaches, in fields, on mountains and in deserts from my travels, both in the UK and abroad. These include jet and fossils from Whitby beaches, bird skulls from Spurn Head, various mineral examples from old workings and assorted shells and driftwood.

I've always tried to bring a small treasure home from wherever we have visited on holiday. I keep these on display in a tray of sand where they look most natural and they cause great interest when visitors (pre-Covid!) come across them. Each one captures a memory and has a story to tell. Below is a photograph of my 'treasure tray'.

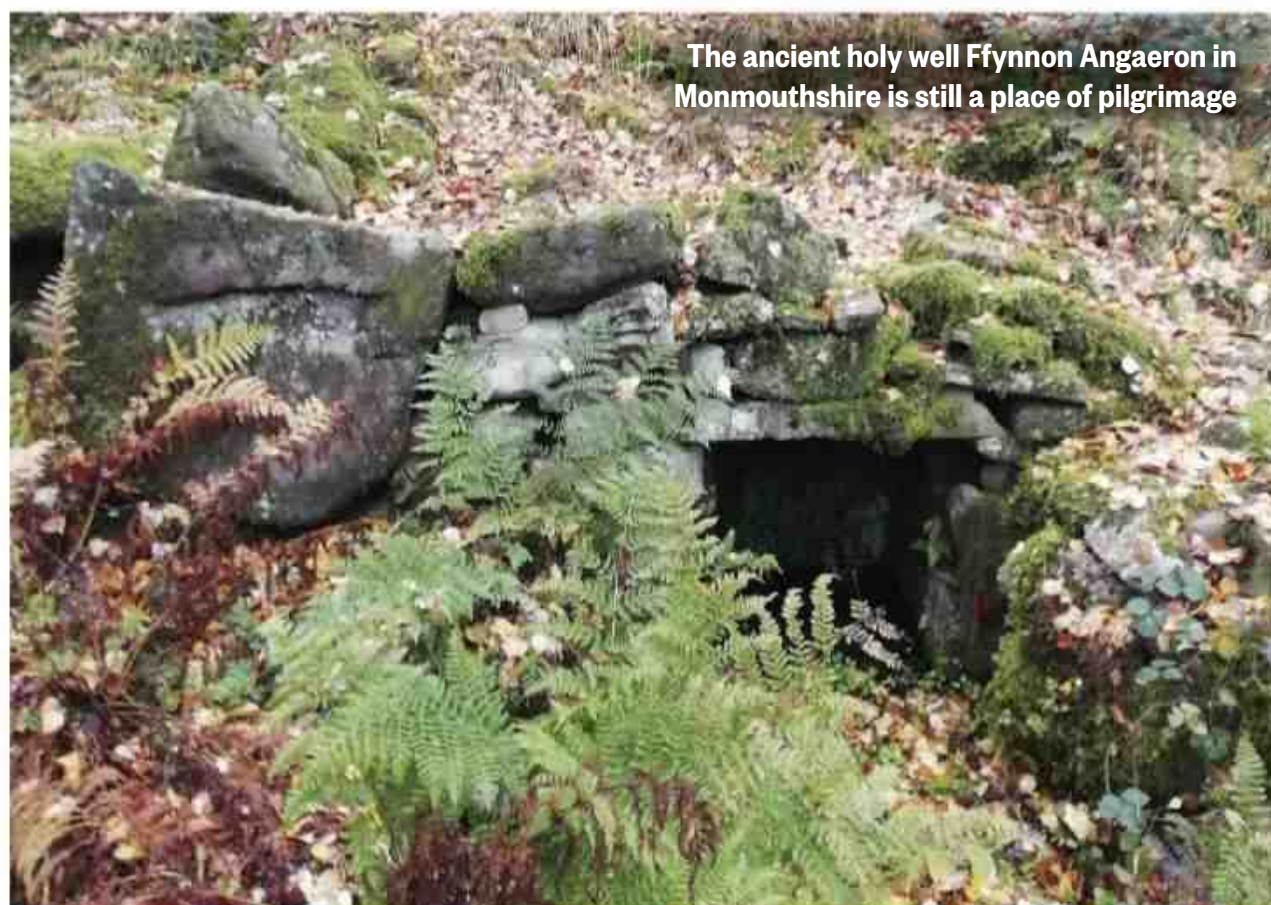
Can I also say a big thank you to the *BBC Countryfile Magazine* team for keeping us inspired and positive during these difficult times with such interesting and informative articles and stunning photographs? Each edition is a joy to receive.

David Binnington
Riding Close, Doncaster



THE PRIZE This star letter wins a portable and lightweight **Helinox Chair One**, worth £90. Easy to assemble thanks to DAC aluminium alloy technology and with breathable fabric for great comfort, the Helinox Chair One comes in a tiny pack size and weighs only 850g. [helinox.eu](https://www.helinox.eu)





The ancient holy well Ffynnon Angaeron in Monmouthshire is still a place of pilgrimage

A deep well of podcasts to enjoy

“Thank you for the interesting *BBC Countryfile Magazine* podcasts I have been listening to recently. I started with the journey to the holy well near Goytre and while you were describing the journey there, I was working in a customer’s garden collecting twigs and branches to take to the tip. The podcast took me from the garden to the ups and downs of Wales where you were hunting for the well. This enjoyable podcast made the job such a pleasure and ease to finish.”

Craig Campbell, Ashgrove, Queensland, Australia

Listen to podcast 86, the quest to find the holy well, at pod.fo/e/blff1

COMPENSATIONS OF AGE

Under the title ‘The Thoughtless Few’, Bill Gillings (Letters, January issue) referred to the threat of verbal and physical abuse when commenting on people’s discarded rubbish. This reminded me of the time when a young couple ahead of me threw some rubbish on the side of the path and I called after them that they had dropped something. I said there was a rubbish bin next to them and they should use it.

The youth turned to me (I am in my 80s) and glared, but picked up his rubbish with the added comment: “If you weren’t so old, mate, I would have belted you one.” Age has its compensations after all!

Also, while resting and watching the awful weather but needing exercise, the following came to me: *‘Decision’*

To go or not to go – that is the question.

Whether it is better to suffer the rain and wind of this outrageous weather

Or to take abed against this sea of conditions and by ignoring them oppose them.

To sleep? To rest?

No more, and so by walking to say we enjoy the heartache and the thousand natural shocks that our flesh is air to



– ’tis a consummation devoutly to be enjoyed!

(With apologies to The Bard.)

Michael Bass, Banwell, Somerset

THE ART OF NATURE

I just want to say how much I enjoyed your ‘podcast’ with artist Lucy Pendrick (episode 87). She has quite a following and I love how her knowledge and appreciation of nature comes through in her writing and videos that she shares through her Facebook page.

Lucy is a very special young woman with a unique ability to transport her listeners/readers to the special places that she visits and to remind us to stop, look, listen, feel and appreciate what is out there if we just take the time.

Linda Carlson, Oregon, USA

CAN WE REVIVE RURAL RETAIL?

I saw an interesting article in your January issue, which explored the state of shops in rural towns and villages. This is certainly important, given the demise of national chain stores up and down the UK. This should be the impetus for all political parties, to get together to reform business rates and local taxation. I feel there should be a way for local taxation to benefit local authorities, ensuring local businesses continue to benefit at the same time.

I saw a letter in a local newspaper suggesting an alternative to business rates. That is a good start. Maybe now is the time for everyone to actively suggest a new form of taxation that doesn’t stifle local businesses with higher costs, but actively raises extra money for local authorities at the same time? What do others think?

James Levens, Cumbria

CORRECTION

In our guide to early spring songsters on page 12 in the February issue, we gave the mistle thrush’s colloquial name as the ‘stormcrow’ when it is the ‘stormcock’.

Spacious daypacks

Sometimes a 20–25 litre daypack just isn't big enough for all your countryside adventures. Time to invest in a 30- to 40-litre pack for picnics, trips to the beach or multi-day walks from inn to inn

Words **Pat Kinsella**



Cholatse 32:37, Lowe Alpine, £125, rab.equipment/uk

The all-new Cholatse is a highly technical four-season pack, with dedicated fixtures for carrying serious alpine equipment, including trekking poles and ice-axe. The easy-to-adjust back system keeps the pack away from your skin and prevents sweatiness, and the harness is highly breathable. Fins on the waist belt hug your hips like a tango dancer, and both feature good-size zipped pockets. The big main compartment houses a pocket for a water reservoir, a Velcro hook and an exit hole for the hose, and there are water-bottle pockets on each side of the pack. The main compartment is

accessible from a long side zipper, so you can reach whatever you need without popping the hood and disgorging all the contents. A large outer pocket is perfect for wet gear. The hood has a generous outer pocket and a big inner pocket for valuables. Other features include adjustable sternum straps with a whistle, two compression straps, and an integrated rain cover in its own pocket. The 32-litre volume can be expanded to 37 litres using the extendable lid. With all these features, the overall weight is a fairly substantial 1.53kg.

VERDICT Comfortable and clever, with well-designed and generous storage areas. **9/10**



**BEST
eco pack**

Drift Waterproof Roll-top, Finisterre, £135, finisterre.com

Cornish brand Finisterre makes kit for outdoor folk with one foot in the water. This excellent pack is essentially a 30-litre drybag equipped with a sophisticated backpack harness and various other features. Made entirely from PVC-free recycled materials, the Drift is 100% waterproof, so you can take it out in all weathers and any kind of adventure, including canoeing and packrafting. The adjustable harness is backed by a breathable foam board, to cut down on sweating. The pack has mesh bottle-pockets on both sides, and there's a showerproof pocket on the front.

VERDICT Wonderful waterproof pack for wild days on the trail. **8/10**



Crosstrail 32, Jack Wolfskin, £110, jack-wolfskin.com

The unisex 32-litre pack boasts an Air Control System, which uses taut mesh across a steel frame to keep the pack away from your back, reducing sweatiness. Both hip fins have pockets. The main compartment is accessible from the front via a long zip; An internal sleeve fits a hydration bladder. A big mesh front pouch is ideal for wet gear and pockets on either side take bottles. The lid has two zip pockets (one inside, one outside). There are hoops for attaching poles, and a rain cover. Made using eco-dyeing. It weighs 1.18kg.

VERDICT A tried and tested pack with interesting innovative flourishes and eco-friendly adaptations. **8/10**



Talon 36 (m)/Tempest 34 (w), Osprey, £150, ospreyeurope.com

Made from recycled nylon and free of harmful PFC chemicals, the new men's Talon 36 and women's Tempest 34 are ideal for long days in the hills. The exceptionally comfortable injection-moulded back allows plenty of airflow. Behind this is an external water-bladder sleeve. The waist belt has two hip wings, each with a big pocket. There is easy access to the large main compartment. A front pocket made from robust mesh houses waterproofs, and the side pockets fit water bottles. There are ice axe and trekking pole attachments, but no rain cover. The Talon 36 weighs 1.1kg.

VERDICT A high-performing pack for hill walkers. **8/10**



**BEST
value**

Ozone 30, Vango £80, vango.co.uk

The 30-litre, unisex Ozone is loaded with features you'd expect on far pricier packs. The taut mesh back reduces sweating by keeping the bulk of the bag away from your back. The waist belt has good hip fins, both with decent-sized pockets. A big mesh sleeve pocket on the front takes wet gear, and mesh pockets on either side are perfect for poles or bottles you want to keep within reach. Inside there's a water-bladder sleeve. Other features include a trekking pole carrying-clip and a rain cover. And it weighs just 980g.

VERDICT Great value, fully-featured and versatile pack for hill hiking and trail strolling. **8/10**

**BEST
all-
rounder**



Azote 32, Montane, £100, montane.com

Excellent for less technical walking adventures. A one-size-fits-all design, the back system is fully adjustable. The harness is made with breathable mesh designed to reduce contact with your lower back. Behind this is an external sleeve for a hydration pack. The waist belt has comfortable hip fins, with good-sized pockets. A large sleeve pocket on the front takes wet gear, and two large side pockets for carrying bottles are angled so you can reach them without taking the pack off. The removable hood also has an outer and an inner pocket, both with zips. It's a pretty lightweight 925g.

VERDICT A modest but reliable performer for peak and park. **7/10**



Deuter Trail Pro 36, £135, deutergb.co.uk

Renowned for robust construction and good design, Deuter packs are now free of harmful PFC chemicals, too. Loaded with features but with an uncluttered look, the 36-litre Trail Pro has a body-hugging design, with padded ridges that keep the pack off your back. The waist belt has two wide hip wings, each with big pockets. The large compartment can be opened from the front; inside is a sleeve for a hydration bladder. There are two side pockets – one for a water bottle, one long and zipped. There's a large mesh pocket for wet gear and an integrated raincover. It weighs a substantial 1.49kg.

VERDICT Dynamic, stylish pack that's ready for anything. **8/10**



Arrio 30, Gregory, £95, eu.gregorypacks.com

This slimline pack weighs only 850g, and features a ventilated back panel made of mesh stretched across a concave frame, which keeps you cool and comfortable. Two large zippable outer pockets are accessible from the sides and are big enough for a map and binoculars. The waist belt is thin, with only small hip fins and no pockets. The main compartment contains a water-bladder sleeve. Other features include a water-bottle pocket on one side, a rain cover and fittings for attaching trekking poles.

VERDICT Lightweight, with excellent access options, this is a highly capable cargo carrier for hikers and hill walkers. **7/10**



Alp Trainer 35+3, Salewa, £135, salewa.com

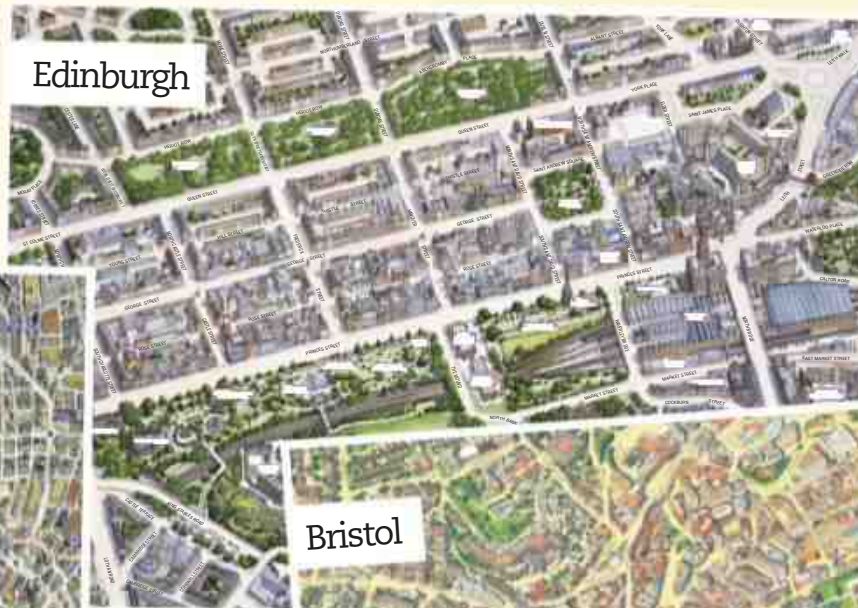
This four-season unisex pack is essentially a scaled-down expedition backpack. The concave back keeps contact with the body to a minimum. Hip fins with large splits reduce sweatiness, but you can feel the harness when wearing anything less than a midlayer, which could become annoying on long days. The main compartment can be divided into upper and lower sections. Other features include internal water-bladder sleeve, pole-carrying loops, rain cover, outer bottle pockets and bungee cords for wet kit. It weighs 1.35kg.

VERDICT Boasts all the features of a full-sized backpack – a good daypack also ideal for occasional overnight expeditions. **7/10**

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COUNTRYSIDE QUIZ

answers at bottom of page 105



The Pembrokeshire island of Skomer is home to tens of thousands of nesting seabirds each spring and summer

1. According to folklore, what does an aspen leaf under the tongue bestow?

- a) Pain relief
- b) Wisdom
- c) Eloquence
- d) Beauty

2. Conservationist Sir Peter Scott was named after which famous fictional character?

- a) Peter Pan
- b) Peter Rabbit
- c) Peter Piper
- d) Peter Parker

3. What does the Shetland term 'the Mirrie Dancers' refer to?

- a) The Highland reel
- b) The Northern Lights
- c) Sea pinks
- d) Shetland ponies

4. Both Braemore and St Catherine's Hill in Hampshire have examples of a 'mismaze' – what is it?

- a) A medieval chapel
- b) A Celtic cross
- c) A turf maze
- d) A stone circle

5. Which traditional item was banned in 1644?

- a) Flower garland
- b) Maypole
- c) Plum pudding
- d) Marmalade

6. In Old English, May was known as 'Thrimilice', meaning what?

- a) Mud month
- b) Month of the high moon

- c) Thunder month
- d) Month of three milkings

7. What colour legs does the black guillemot have?

- a) Yellow
- b) Black
- c) Blue
- d) Red

8. Bonxie is another name for which seabird?

- a) White-tailed eagle
- b) Gannet
- c) Great skua
- d) Osprey

9. Which wildflower is pictured, left?

- a) Common spotted orchid
- b) Knapweed
- c) Meadowsweet
- d) Great burnet

10. The ghost of whom is said to roam Ardrossan Castle on stormy nights?

- a) Robert the Bruce
- b) William Wallace
- c) Robert Roy
- d) Bonnie Prince Charlie

11. Queen Boudica and the Iceni tribe lived 2,000 years ago in an area corresponding with which modern county?

- a) Wiltshire
- b) Derbyshire
- c) Devon
- d) Norfolk

12. Around half the world's population of which seabird nests on Skomer Island?

- a) Manx shearwaters
- b) Razorbills
- c) Atlantic puffins
- d) European storm petrels

13. Which island was called Vectis by ancient Romans?

- a) Isle of Man
- b) Anglesey
- c) Isle of Wight
- d) Arran

14. Roughly how many grouse are shot for sport in Britain every year?

- a) 15,000
- b) 50,000
- c) 350,000
- d) 500,000

15. What is 'ichor'?

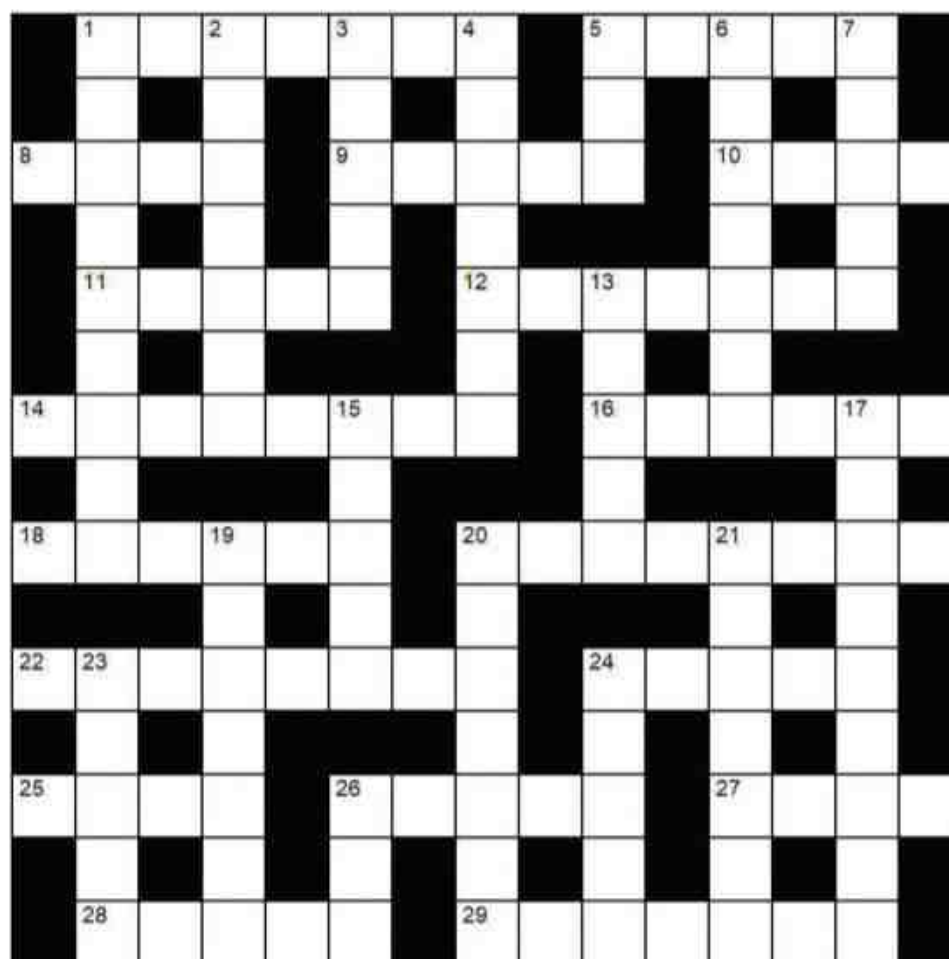
- a) A fragrant, harmless gas
- b) Fungal spores
- c) Fluid that runs in the veins of mythical Greek gods
- d) A type of mountain ice

COUNTRYSIDE CROSSWORD

by Eddie James

ACROSS

- 1** Ridge between a horse's shoulder blades... becomes dry and shrivelled (7)
5 Abandon a drainage channel (5)
8 Dingle... in glade, Llandudno (4)
9 Ravine – that of Lydford is the deepest in SW England (5)
10 Tidal wave e.g. on the Severn in spring (4)
11/7 down Large draught animal once used for ploughing etc. (5,5)
12/23 down Hill range connecting several Snowdon summits – lit Greenland, oddly! (7,5)
14 Britain's highest mountain (3,5)
16 Coastal wildflower, the 'sea pink' (6)
18 Pollen-producing part of a flower (6)
20 Ephemeral insects hatching in late spring – I'm safely scattering (8)
22 ___ Edge, a Peak District escarpment – first half's amphibian! (8)
24 Broken-in, domesticated (5)
25 In brief, an organisation for those prepared to walk further... in Wealdway (4)
26 Circular cluster e.g. of sweet woodruff leaves (5)
27 As pigs search for truffles... and a plant's underground stem (4)
28 Way in – comprises East-North attempt (5)



29 Town on Ireland's Kerry Way – gets me and Karen rambling! (7)

DOWN

- 1** World famous SSSI and nature reserve in Dudley – home of Britain's shortest bird? (5,4)
2 *Lord of the Rings* author (7)
3 Bird of prey – could be golden or white-tailed (5)
4 Natural water sources – might be well dressed in summer? (7)
5/26 down Cross-border riverside LDP of England/Wales (3,3)
6 Name of flat-topped hills on southern edge of North York Moors – a brutal formation (7)
7 See **11 across**
13 Flavour of Jerusalem artichokes? Crazy! (5)
15 Periwinkle genus – held by Kevin, carefully (5)
17 Short-tailed prolific mouselike mammal – loved life, wildly! (5,4)
19 Like the nightingale overwintering in Africa (7)
20 Derbyshire's county town famed for nearby Victorian spa (7)
21 Cornish village and cove on the SW Coast Path – a normal sort (7)
23 See **12 across**
24 Raptor's sharp, hooked claw (5)
26 See **5 down**

CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS

MARCH

ACROSS: 1 Copper
 5 Dabchick 9 Pier 10 Foxes
 11 Rams 12 Grasmere
 13/29 Marble Arch 14 Scilly
 17 Sherwood 19 Storm off
 22 Gored 24 Relief
 26 Rothesay 30 Leger
 31 Bird 32 Glampers

DOWN: 2 Osier 3 Parasol
 4 Ruffe 5 Dexters 6 Besom
 7 Hardraw 8 Camelford
 15 Cathedral 16 Yeo 18 Egg
 20 Rainham 21 Forages
 23 Reed-bed 25/33 False Widow 27 Throw 28 Arrow.

APRIL

ACROSS: 1 Stacks 4 Avocet
 8 Bath 9 Tuber 11 Sows
 12 Red deer 13 Alford
 15 Rapids 17 Windrows
 19 Redstart 21 Gallop
 22 Thresh 24 Hederal
 26 Orca 28 Early 29 Vane
 30/1D Devil's Staircase
 31 Spades

DOWN: 2 Aphid 3 Kittens
 5 Vervain 6 Cos 7 Tower
 10 Birdwatcher 14 Feral
 16 Issue 18 Woodlands
 20 Ashwell 21 Giddy-up
 23 Hared 25 Roved 27 ATV.

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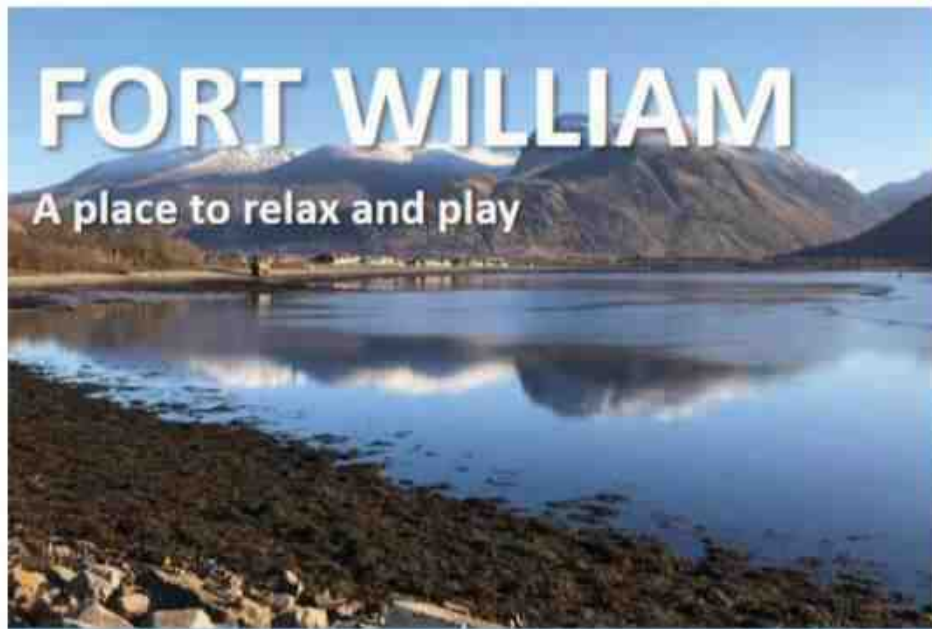
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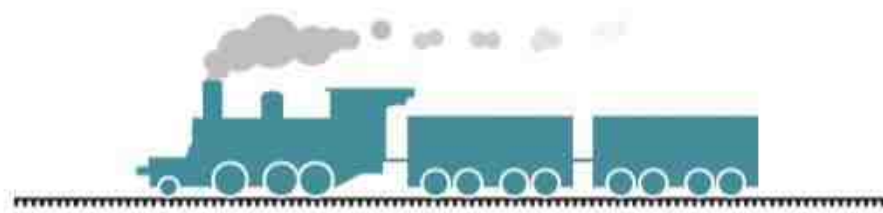


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1



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2



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3



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4



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WALES

5



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STAFFORDSHIRE

9



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GWYNEDD

11



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PECORAMA GARDENS

DEVON

6



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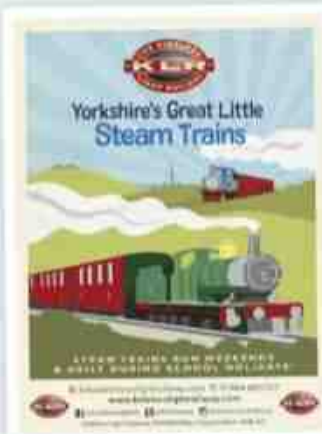
mountain scenery. The 12 mile narrow track gauge allows the railway to follow the contours of the terrain with many sharp curves and steep gradients which add to the railway's charm.

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WEST YORKSHIRE

12



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Ellie Harrison

While online life has been a saviour in lockdown, there's nothing quite like real experiences

“As commendable as Zoom calls have been, they are still light years away from the real thing. Without an instructor to correct posture, a therapist to feel the atmosphere of empathy or the ability to read an awkward silence from a friend, online life misses nearly everything. Someone I know has just put in a lots-of-zeros offer on a house they have only seen on a computer, yet I happen to know that it has the noise of an A-road, a railway line and professional dog kennels within earshot of the front door.

TIME TO STRETCH OUR WINGS

Local walks in the real world have mollified us through this dreadful year but, although there are some people for whom lockdown has been an entirely preferable way of life, many of us want to go out way beyond the horizon once more.

It's physical presence and real encounters that we covet. The list will be unique to everyone, but these are just a handful of the experiences I am booking in for when lockdown eases.

MY POST-LOCKDOWN PLANS

1. Festival life, sitting on the dry grass, drinking and listening to music in the sun. Curiously for me it's a subconscious benchmark for easy company – would they just sit on the ground with me in the sunshine or do they require a knife and fork and chair? I can tell you, the answer has nothing to do with age.
2. Wondering at the sky stage-set for startling murmurations at dusk on Brighton Pier or the Somerset Levels. It's a show of simplicity and quiet that will return you peacefully to bed.
3. Finally getting to stay overnight in a treehouse, a plan that has been kicked down the calendar months over and over again. This one is a gem, with a miniature and minimal two-roomed cabin perched up in the canopy, surrounded by a tiny deck and finished off with a bath tub to soak up the birdsong.
4. Swimming in the sea, just about anywhere. Funnily enough, beaches are the places where social distancing (a phrase I hope dies out swiftly) has been inherent in British culture forever.
5. Catching sight of bats against the last light, telling fleeting secrets of their evening's plans.
6. Hearing skylarks lifting off into the clouds as the weather warms. My best tip for learning their song is to listen to Josh Wink's *Higher State of Consciousness*, particularly at 2:55.
7. Going anywhere in rural Scotland.
8. Games of rounders and picnics complete with all-size scotch eggs, flasks of coffee and anything else that was once deemed controversial. I'm especially looking forward to an end to the fear of suspicion that had poisoned us all. From now on, we are all countryside allies who love the natural world. We pass each other with respect and smiles, safe in the knowledge that nobody is trying to harm one another and nobody is about to squeal to a hotline.
9. Paddleboarding wherever they'll have me.
10. Filming across the whole of these lands, meeting good people who represent our full country life and whose real stories off-camera will never cease to fascinate me. But especially standing side-by-side with contributors and crew members, elbowing each other as we laugh, heads together looking at the monitor and shaking hands in physical recognition of each other, under the sky and in this new moment.



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SCAN ME

We're blessed in the UK to have four distinct seasons, each embodied by its own heady brew of melody, scent, colour and light. It's hard to pick a favourite, but after the long, deep freeze of winter, spring has to be up there.











It's a season of emergence and opportunity, when songbirds fill our woodlands, rivers glisten and burble, and insects murmur along warm country lanes. Spring is an invitation – a calling card to be among nature, to be a part of it.

This pocket-size booklet includes 10 family-friendly walking and cycling routes through some of our most charming landscapes, from Snowdonia's glacial valleys and Cheshire's wending canals to the Highlands' great lochs. At last, spring has arrived – it's time to get outside and enjoy it.



Daniel Graham is section editor of *BBC Countryfile Magazine*

CONTENTS

	1 St Catherine's Hill Hampshire	4
	2 Crinan Canal Argyll and Bute	8
	3 Saundersfoot to Tenby Pembrokeshire	12
	4 Exe Estuary Trail Devon	18
	5 Murlough NNR County Down	22
	6 Macclesfield Canal Cheshire	28
	7 Loch Garten NR Highland	32
	8 Aber Falls Gwynedd	36
	9 Forest of Dean Gloucestershire	42
	10 Ullswater Cumbria	46



All these routes are available from the Komoot website at [komoot.com/user/countryfile](https://www.komoot.com/user/countryfile). For more walks, visit [countryfile.com](https://www.countryfile.com)



St Catherine's Hill Hampshire

Take a springtime stroll to the summit of a wildflower-topped beacon in historic Winchester. By **Stephanie Cross**



DISTANCE: 5 MILES/8KM **TIME:** 2.5–3 HOURS

LEVEL: MODERATE **ASCENT:** 91M

TERRAIN: Initially flat on paved and gravel pavements and tracks, the route then climbs steadily on a well-maintained gravel and dirt path.



01



It's the thin, nutrient-poor soil of this 58-hectare chalk grassland site that allows spring flowers to thrive. Come April and May, the western boundary of the reserve transforms into a carpet of yellow cowslips. Later in the season, fragrant, pyramidal and bee orchids emerge – species that, along with rock rose, horseshoe vetch and salad burnet, enjoy the lack of competition from more vigorous plants. Shetland sheep roam the hill, keeping down taller, shade-casting grasses. It's hardly surprising that St Catherine's is also a haven for butterflies: the Adonis and small blues and the brown argus are the spring-emerging species to spot. ➔

LEFT At the height of the wildflower season, more than 20 species can be found per square metre on St Caths



ABOVE Magnificent Winchester Cathedral was founded in 1079

1 CLEAR WATERS

This delightful spring walk starts outside Winchester's 11th-century cathedral, last resting place of Jane Austen. Make your way through the cloister then turn right through The Close, passing the Pilgrim's School to exit through Priory Gate. Soon after, turn left under the 14th-century King's Gate on to College Street. Turn left, then right on to College Walk to leave the road on a track to the right. At the gate, go left to follow the path alongside the crystal-clear River Itchen. The 26-mile-long chalk stream is home to the rare southern damselfly and white-clawed crayfish, as well as Atlantic salmon, brown trout, water voles and otters.

Pass the college playing fields, cross the road, and pick up the gravel path opposite (signposted Clarendon Way).

Head across fields towards the 12th-century church and hospital of St Cross. Keep to the path through an avenue of trees, then fork left through a gate to follow the path to the old mill. Join the gravel path and, at the road, turn left to continue beyond the barrier.

2 ABOVE THE CITY

At the convergence of paths, turn left to continue along the Itchen Navigation, reaching a turning to St Catherine's Hill on your right. Then it's a steep climb up the imposing seam of wooden steps, but you'll be rewarded by fine summit views.

3 HILLTOP CHAPEL

St Catherine's Hill is named after the vanished 12th-century Chapel of St Catherine, once to be found in the beech woods here. Now you'll chiefly find abundant birdlife: whitethroats, yellowhammers, blackcaps and green woodpeckers. Just over the crest of the hill to the right is the intriguing 17th-century turf 'mizmaze'. Beyond, steps mark the beginning of the descent back into the town.

At the base of the hill, turn right through the car park, cross the road, and follow the path marked Pilgrim's Trail. On reaching the road, turn left and continue until you reach College Walk, then turn right to return to College Street.



01

ELEVATION PROFILE



MAP ROUTE

Scan here to access this route on your mobile device.





Crinan Canal Argyll and Bute

Cycle from loch to sea along a 200-year-old canal, famed as Britain's most beautiful shortcut. By **Fergal MacErlean**



Flat and easy to navigate,
the canal is perfect for
family bike rides

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DISTANCE: 14.2 MILES/22.9KM (RETURN)
TIME: 2.5–3 HOURS **LEVEL:** MODERATE **ASCENT:** 130M
TERRAIN: A mostly flat, well-graded towpath with one quiet road section. Two optional detours both involve road cycling and are for traffic-confident cyclists only.



02

The most glorious cycle routes are often found beside waterways – gentle rivers, placid lakes, remote reservoirs and, of course, along countryside canals. One of the finest cycles in Britain follows the Crinan Canal, once an important shipping shortcut on the west coast of Scotland.

The specially designed *Linnet* steamer was launched in 1866 to meet demand from passengers, replacing the horse-drawn barges that had plied the canal since it opened in 1801. The major canal project gave ships an alternative route to the treacherous waters around the Mull of Kintyre. The resulting nine-mile-long canal, which spans Knapdale, allowed vessels journeying from the Clyde to the west coast to cut more than 100 miles off their voyage.

In spring when the sun shines, the waterway comes alive with lush banks of grasses and reeds, and at the western end there is a huge area of bogland – always a mysterious sight. You might see ospreys returning from their overwintering sojourn, as hen harriers quarter the vast expanse of bog through which

the estuarine River Add flows. Large mudflats offer rich pickings for curlews and other waders. Otters hunt in quiet stretches of the canal too, as dazzling kingfishers dive in its clean waters – a rare sight in this part of the country. Later in the spring, minke whales, porpoises and

Dazzling kingfishers dive in the canal's clean waters

dolphins are often sighted from the end of the canal at Crinan.

This fabulously flat route runs along the well-surfaced towpath, with one very quiet road section. En route there are bags of historical attractions, and good places to eat, too. At the canal's end, the sense of the journey, where countless sea-bound vessels have gone before, is striking.

1 LOCH TO SEA

Begin from Lochgilphead by the sea loch of Loch Fyne and head west out of town on the main coast road (there is a footpath). Turn left at the junction signed Campbeltown. You will see the raised canal bank ahead of you. Take the sloping road opposite to meet it, turning right at the top to begin your traffic-free journey to Crinan; Ardrishaig Harbour at the eastern end of the canal is two miles to the left where a short road section leads to a canal heritage hub.

2 LOCH STOP

At Cairnbaan, about two miles into the journey, there is a friendly food bar in the Cairnbaan Hotel beside the first in a series of locks. Follow signs from the hotel car park to reach the prehistoric Cairnbaan Rock Art – a 20-minute uphill walk.

3 BOGLANDS

Continuing onwards, Sustrans' National Cycle Network (NCN) 78 follows a minor road on the canal's right. Enjoy easy riding before gently descending. The trail is closed to traffic from Lock Number 11. Soon there are views over a wild expanse of bog on the right. Known as Móine Mhór, Gaelic for 'great moss', this is one of the best preserved and most extensive raised bogs in the UK. Sunshine illuminates its myriad

lochans while clouded skies can cast it into another realm.

4 FORTS AND BEAVERS

At Bellanoch, two superb diversions can be made on road by traffic-confident riders, or visited later in the day by vehicle.

The first four-mile detour heads north on NCN 78 over Islandadd Bridge – a popular feeding spot for wildfowl and waders. Turn right after two miles, then right again on to the busy A816 (no path). After half a mile, a final right takes you to the impressive Dunadd fort.

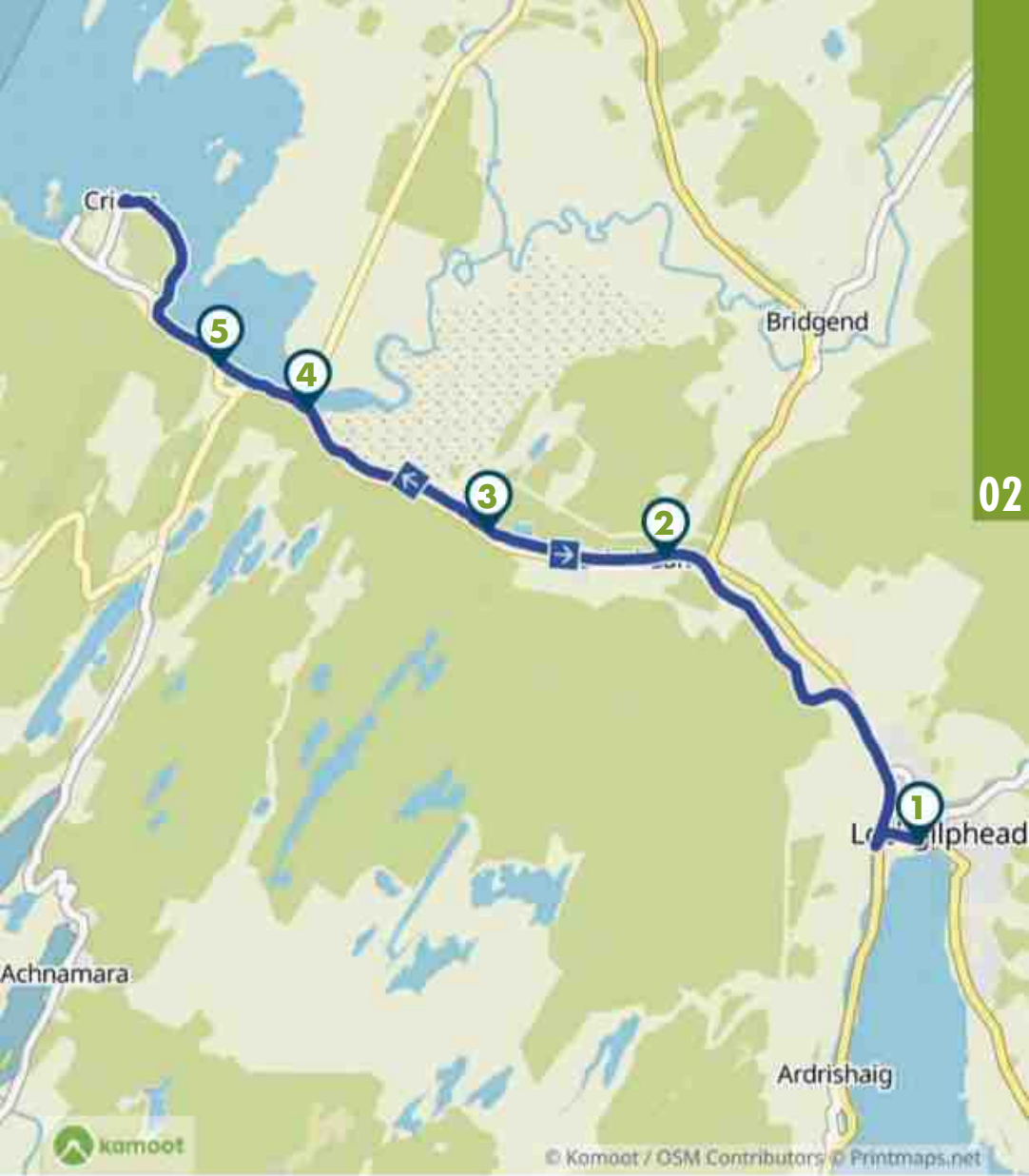
Back on the canal, a second detour veers south from Bellanoch. Follow the hilly road for 1.5 miles to a car park at Barnluasgan, which serves the Scottish Beaver Trial.

5 SOUND VIEWS

Journeying on along the canal, the promise of the open sea beyond the Sound of Jura would have been a welcome sight for sailors of old, knowing they had avoided the perilous breakers off Kintyre.

For the cyclist it is a splendid section, as the way cuts right between the canal's waters and the large estuary of the River Add.

From Crinan Basin, with its coffee shop and upmarket hotel, there is a fine view of Jura and Scarba islands. Enjoy the setting before returning to Lochgilphead.



ELEVATION PROFILE



MAP ROUTE

Scan here to access this route on your mobile device.





Saundersfoot to Tenby Pembrokeshire

Explore the beaches and seaside towns of Pembrokeshire's gorgeous south coast as it bursts into life. By **Tor McIntosh**

Perched on the western fringes of Carmarthen Bay, the charming seaside towns of Tenby and Saundersfoot are designated conservation areas that offer

superb Blue Flag beaches and picturesque harbours. The Pembrokeshire Coast Path runs between the two towns, presenting walkers with a range of habitats,




DISTANCE: 8.8 MILES/14.2KM **TIME:** 4.5–5 HOURS

LEVEL: MODERATE **ASCENT:** 236M

TERRAIN: An undulating section on the stony, tree-rooted coast path, then inland along country lanes, woodland paths and town pavements.



from beaches and rocky cliffs to woodlands and farmland. This circular route follows the coast path then returns inland via hedge-lined tracks and quiet country lanes. 

03

**View of Saundersfoot Bay from
Monkstone Point on the 186-mile-long
Pembrokeshire Coast Path**

Photo: Getty

1 SAUNTERING ON FOOT

Facing the sea at Saundersfoot, walk right past the harbour, then left up the B4316 until you reach a minor road called The Glen. Follow this to a sharp right-hand bend.

2 IN AND OUT OF TREES

At the bend, follow a path that leads steeply uphill, winding along the Pembrokeshire Coast Path (acorn waymarks). The path drops into woods, where birds titter among the canopies and butterflies flutter around spring flowers. Once out of the trees there are fine views, initially over Saundersfoot Bay and then, once you round Monkstone Point, of Tenby and Caldey Island.

Take your time on this section as it's a great vantage point for spotting wildlife. Ravens and peregrine falcons often spiral above the cliffs and, if you're lucky, you might see dolphins and seals playing in the sea.

3 LIKE A POSTCARD

As the classic postcard view of the colourful Victorian houses surrounding Tenby harbour nears, the coast path veers inland and descends into Waterwynch valley. At a driveway leading to Dingle Cottage, follow the acorn sign straight across to join Waterwynch Lane, the last big climb before reaching Tenby. After passing a campsite, the path joins a road

that runs along the clifftop above North Beach. The Atlantic waters can still be quite cold in spring, but if you have the time and desire, it's a good place for a dip.

4 INLAND AMBLE

Continue along the road and turn right on to Norton Road. At a left-hand bend, turn right up steps and follow the path to a drive; bear right along a track past a cemetery. Continue along the tree-lined track and at a bridleway sign turn left along a narrow trail before taking a sharp left at another bridleway sign on to a wide path.

At a meeting of paths, turn right and descend to the busy A478. Cross the road carefully and continue along the track opposite, which drops into a woodland valley.

5 INTO SAUNDERSFOOT

Turn right at a bridge on to a trail that runs below a railway line. After 100m, bear right along a woodland track and climb to Knightson Farm. Turn right past a caravan site to once again meet the A478. Cross over the busy road and follow a path through a housing estate until you reach a main road; you'll see New Hedges village hall opposite. Turn left on to the B4316 and continue on this road for a mile, through New Hedges, before descending into Saundersfoot.



ELEVATION PROFILE



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Exe Estuary Trail Devon

Journey from the bustle of Devon's capital to the snaking banks and quietude of the Exe Estuary. By **Christopher Ridout**



DISTANCE: 17.2 MILES/27.1 (RETURN)

TIME: 2.5–3 HOURS

LEVEL: EASY–MODERATE **ASCENT:** 38M

TERRAIN: Easy, flat and mostly off-road cycling along paved and gravel surfaces.



04



Depart the cathedral city of Exeter and follow one of the oldest surviving canals in Britain, taking in Devon's premier wetland. In spring and summer, see lapwings court in tumbling displays over the mudflats, as dragonflies – including the scarce hairy dragonfly – patrol the ditches. Otters are a rare but enthralling sighting in the upper estuary, and grey seals can be found basking on the sandbanks. The Exeter Ship Canal, which runs parallel to the river, is a popular hangout spot for electric-blue kingfishers, while higher in the sky, kestrels and buzzards cast soaring silhouettes. With the option of returning by train, this route makes the perfect springtime cycle ride. 

LEFT The full length of the birdlife-rich Exe Estuary Trail, linking Dawlish Warren to Exmouth, is 22.5 miles



ABOVE The route starts at Exeter's pretty and historic Quayside

1 ISLAND PARK

Start at Exeter's quaint Quayside. The Customs House Visitor Centre offers historical information about the city and the quay, the latter dating to Roman times when a natural sandstone ledge was used to load and unload boats.

Follow Sustrans' National Cycle Network Route 34 as it leaves the quay and passes through the Riverside Valley Park and its buttercup-filled meadows on an island between the River Exe and Exeter Ship Canal. The canal was opened in 1566 to enable boats to reach Exeter's port; the canal was built to bypass weirs that had been erected on the river, forcing boats to dock at Topsham.

2 BIRD SPOTTING

As you pass the Double Locks pub you will see some bird blinds

beside the cycleway, ideal for spotting kingfishers or herons among the reeds.

Where the cycleway crosses the A379, follow signs for National Cycle Network Route 2 towards Dawlish Warren.

3 BIKES AND BOATS

After two miles you will come to an idyllic lock-keeper's cottage. From here, if you wish, you can take a foot ferry to historic Topsham (one-way fare £1.30 per person; dogs, bicycles, pushchairs 70p; under-fives free).

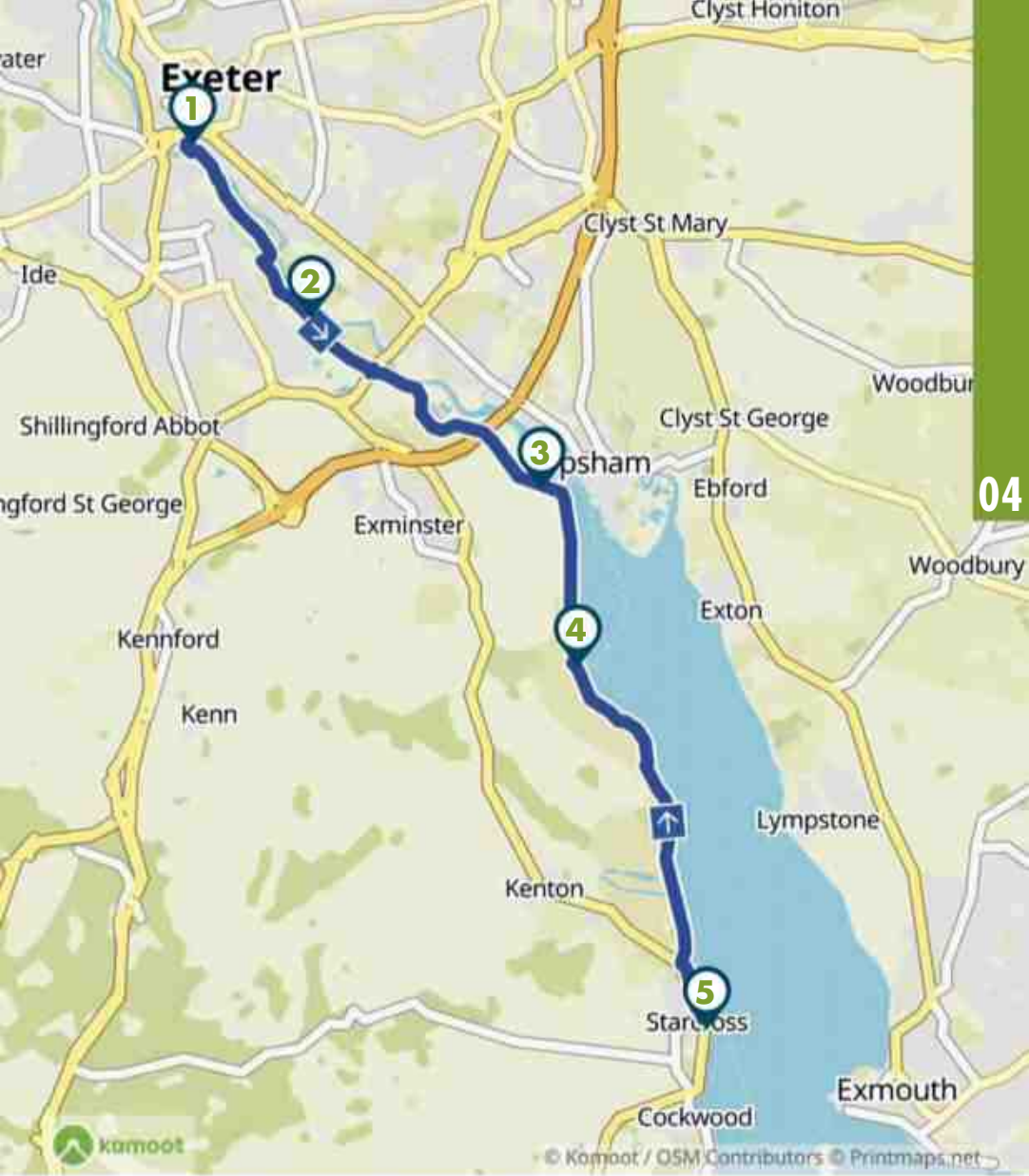
Back on the trail, continue southwards into Exminster and Powderham Marshes Nature Reserve, looking out for mute swans, mallards, moorhens, lapwings, Cetti's warblers and otters in and around the storage pool.

4 FLORA AND FAUNA

After passing the Turf Hotel, the trail crosses the railway line and joins a small quiet lane. This passes Powderham Castle deer park, home to 600 fallow deer as well as oak, chestnut and copper beech trees.

5 RETRACE OR RAIL

After one mile, the cycleway resumes at Starcross and leads to the railway station where you can put your bike on the train back to Exeter, or return the way you came.



ELEVATION PROFILE



MAP ROUTE

Scan here to access this route on your mobile device.





Murlough NNR County Down

Discover butterflies, beetles and sunbathing seals on Northern Ireland's windswept shores. By **Keith Fergus**

Situated 3.5 miles north-east of the town of Newcastle on County Down's sweeping coast is Murlough National Nature Reserve. The long, sandy beach and vast dune system, overlooked by the iconic Mourne Mountains, host a huge diversity of flora and fauna, making the reserve an enriching place to visit for wildlife lovers.

Murlough was Northern Ireland's first National Nature Reserve and has been cared for by the National Trust since 1967. It is thought that human history here extends some 4,000 years, with evidence of occupation from the Neolithic and Bronze Age periods, while the dune system itself is believed to be 6,000 years old.

Today, Murlough – which derives from the Irish 'murlach', meaning 'sea inlet' – is a landscape shifted

and shaped by the wind and waves that whip across the natural enclave of Dundrum Bay.

Habitats at Murlough include species-rich grassland, woodland, coastline and dune heath, an element that is rare across Europe. The dunes themselves climb high above the beach and are only dwarfed by the majestic Mourne Mountains that rise to the south, their gorgeous outline dominating the surrounding landscape.

It's a landscape shifted and shaped by the wind and waves

Rabbits were introduced to Murlough during the 12th century and today the population plays an important role in preserving the dune structure. Wildfowl and waders, common and grey seals, 23 species of butterflies (the reserve is one of the last strongholds of the endangered marsh fritillary), over 250 types of beetle and even the pygmy shrew – the smallest mammal found in Britain – can all be found within the reserve.

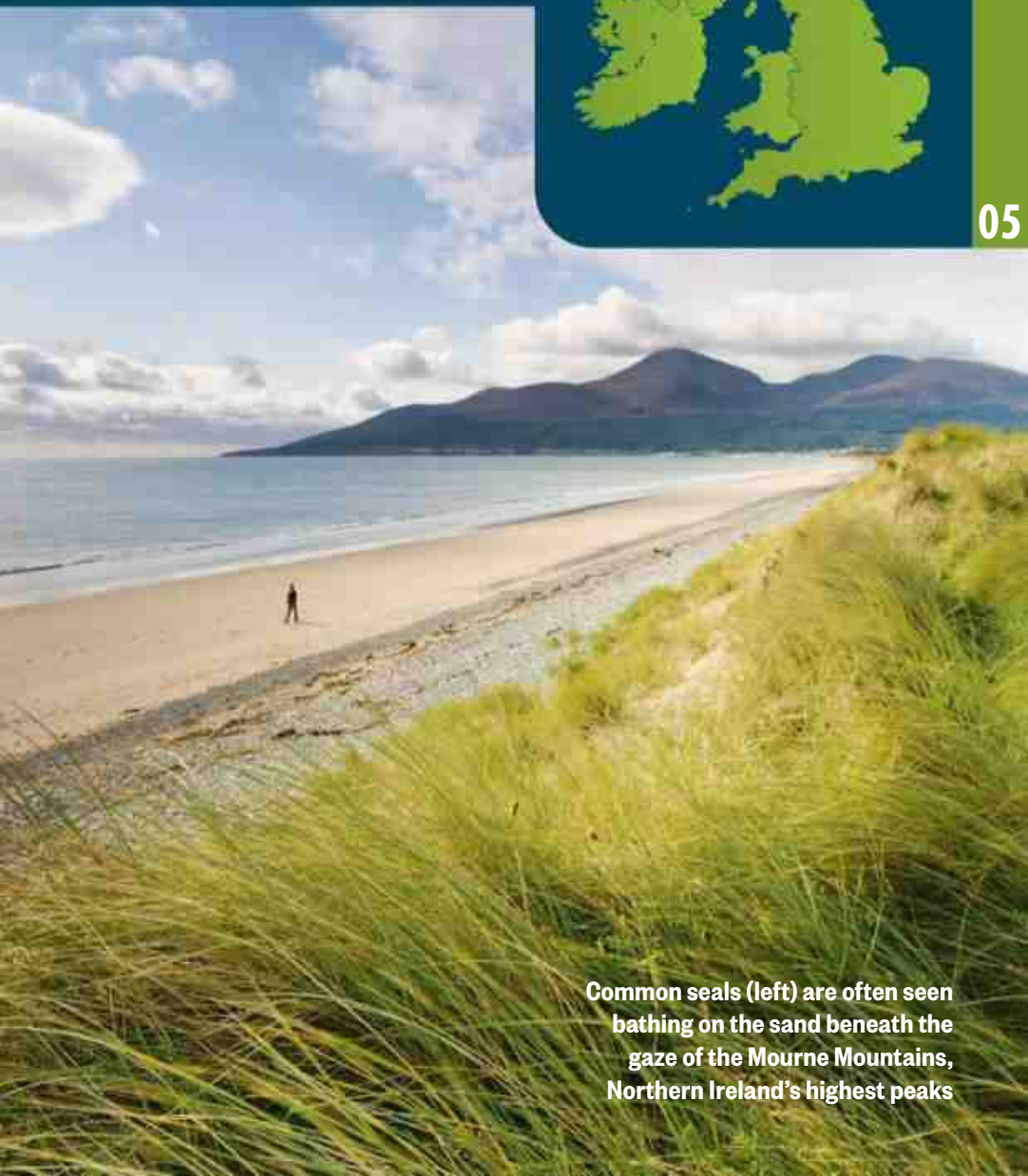


Photos: Alamy

DISTANCE: 3.8 MILES/6.1 KM **TIME:** 1.5–2 HOURS
LEVEL: EASY **ASCENT:** 23M
TERRAIN: Well-maintained boardwalks, flat sandy paths, gravel tracks, some steps. Take care crossing the A2 to and from the car park.



05



Common seals (left) are often seen bathing on the sand beneath the gaze of the Mourne Mountains, Northern Ireland's highest peaks

1 FLOWERS IN THE SAND

The walk starts at the large Murlough National Nature Reserve car park on the north side of the A2, a few minutes' drive from Newcastle. Carefully cross the road into the reserve to join a forked track. Keep right on to a lane then pass through a gate and follow a boardwalk south-east towards Dundrum Bay, backed by 20m-high sand dunes.

The boardwalk veers right and drops down to a fork. Go left through grassland; in spring and summer there are lots of wildflowers here, including wild pansy, bird's-foot trefoil, lady's bedstraw and devil's-bit scabious (a particular favourite of the marsh fritillary).

Continue all the way to the dunes and walk through them to reach the gorgeous beach at Dundrum Bay, where the boardwalk ends.

2 BASKING SEALS

Turn left and follow the curve of Dundrum Bay north-east, with views extending all the way to St John's Point Lighthouse. Built in 1844, it stands 40m high and is the tallest onshore lighthouse on the Irish coast. On the beach, little egrets, dunlins, oystercatchers, golden plovers and godwits are just some of the species that can be seen here at different times of the year.

Continue on, with the beach and dunes eventually curving left to

reach the inlet of Dundrum Bay, a good place to spot common and grey seals basking on the sand.

Now the sand heads north-west along the southern shore of the inlet, to the right of woodland, where there are fine views of the village of Dundrum and its prominent castle. Walk along the sand for 300m to reach a wide gap in the trees.

3 BRIDGING THE BAY

Turn left away from the inlet and head south along the sand for approximately 150m to a flight of steps on the right. Take these into the woodland and follow a path, soon climbing more steps. At the top, continue straight on around a barrier, then turn right on to a road. To the left is Murlough House, dating to around 1900.

Follow the access road north-west, enjoying fine views towards Slieve Croob and Dundrum. When the road eventually leaves the estate grounds, keep on, then, just before reaching Downshire Bridge which spans Dundrum Inner Bay, turn left on to a track.

4 INNER EDGE

The track offers easy walking along the bay; keep right when it splits to pass several cottages before it runs alongside the southern edge of Dundrum Inner Bay all the way back to the car park.



ELEVATION PROFILE



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Macclesfield Canal Cheshire

Cheshire's old industrial links now offer miles of blissful off-road cycling through colourful countryside. **By Neil Coates**



Macclesfield Canal runs for 27.5 miles from Marple in Cheshire to its junction with the Trent and Mersey Canal at Kidsgrove

DISTANCE: 8.9 MILES/14.3KM

TIME: 1.5–2.5 HOURS

LEVEL: EASY–MODERATE **ASCENT:** 137M

TERRAIN: A very short road section, followed by off-road cycling along mostly gravel surfaces with one or two hills.



06



The Cheshire Plain ends abruptly in a jumble of ridges and knolls that rise steeply into the Peak District. Threading along this divide are two contemporary transport arteries that today offer idyllic, easy cycling in glorious wildflower-rich countryside – a mosaic of bluebell-filled woodlands and pastureland rich with industrial heritage.

At its heart is trendy Bollington, which grew as a cotton town in late Georgian times, booming after the Macclesfield Canal opened in 1831. A little downhill from this is a curving viaduct, which until 1970 carried the Macclesfield to Marple railway across the River Dean. This line opened in 1869, a purported successor to the limited capacity of the canal, although both thrived together for many decades. This gentle ride – 99% off-road – makes the most of both these historic routes.

1 POST-OFFICE RIDES

The canal-side cycle hire opposite Adelphi Mill rents out colourful, refurbished post-office bikes. These three-gear machines, with their front baskets and jaunty style, are ideal for this largely level route.

Downhill below the canal aqueduct is the Middlewood Way cycle track, departing to your right (north) in 100m. That's the road section done. The old railway is well-surfaced and shared as a footpath and bridleway. It soon opens out on to the memorable 23-arch viaduct before progressing through wooded cuttings and along ledges revealing sublime views across Cheshire. The bridges en route provide good roosting sites for bat species, such as pipistrelle and noctule, best seen at dusk. Spring warblers and flocks of long-tailed tits sing from the track-side trees and bushes, and the ditches create an ideal habitat for dragonflies and damselflies.



ABOVE Azure damselflies can be seen alongside the old railway line

2 PIT AND WHARF

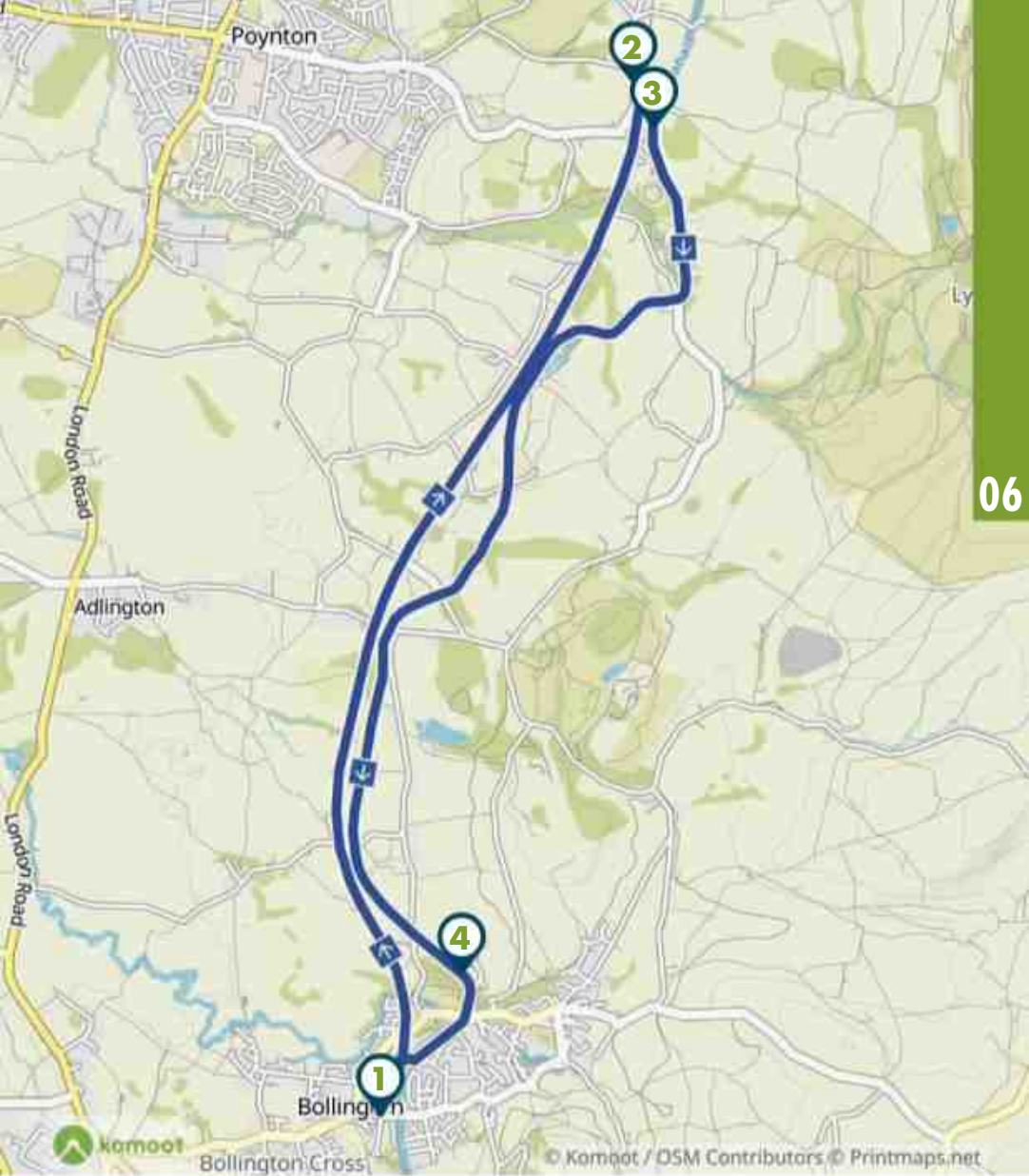
Higher Poynton is reached in four miles, where there is a welcome from the cosy Boars Head pub and the cute Coffee Tavern. Cross the railway bridge to the Heritage Centre at Nelson Pit, where the story of the East Cheshire Coalfield is told. Rise up the access lane to the vibrant Vernon Wharf on the Macclesfield Canal, from where the towpath (canal on the left) heads south to Bollington.

3 DISTANT VIEWS

One of the last canals to be built, the Macclesfield slinks through a glorious hilly landscape, easing across aqueducts bridging becks and lanes that tumble from the shapely heights; Cheshire's highest point (Shining Tor, 559m) is just five miles away. As it progresses, views encompass the Peak District's hills, the mid-Cheshire ridge and the distant smudge of Welsh mountains.

4 TO THE CAFÉ

An easy 4.5 miles brings you to the huge embankment at Bollington; there is a café in Clarence Mill. Adelphi Mill is a further half-mile beyond. Carry your bike down a flight of steps off the aqueduct – topped by an old stable building, now a canoe store – then rise from beneath the canal to find the hire centre.



ELEVATION PROFILE



MAP ROUTE

Scan here to access this route on your mobile device.





Loch Garten NR Highland

Head to a placid Cairngorms loch flanked by towering pine trees to see an astonishing fish-hunting hawk. By **Duncan Haskell**



Hidden within Abernethy Forest in the lowlands of the Cairngorms National Park is Loch Garten. With its ancient Caledonian pine forest, boggy woodland and rich waters, the reserve is an embodiment of the wild and compelling nature of the Scottish Highlands. May is an ideal time to visit, when the weather is

warm but the swarms of midges are yet to descend. The herby scent of pine fills the air, birdlife is abundant as summer migrants such as redstarts and tree pipits arrive, and the ospreys should be hatching their chicks – it's a unique chance to see these graceful fish-scooping predators in action.

DISTANCE: 2.8 MILES/4.5KM **TIME:** 1.5 HOURS

LEVEL: EASY **ASCENT:** 23M

TERRAIN: A short tarmacked section then a flat woodland trail, rooted and muddy in places.



07



**Loch Garten and the surrounding
Abernethy Forest – the RSPB’s second
largest reserve – are home to around
5,000 species of animal and plant**

Photo: Getty



ABOVE Magnificent ospreys have a wingspan of more than 1.5 metres

1 WOODLAND BOG

From the car park at the turn off for the Osprey Centre, follow a path that runs parallel to the road along the north shore of Loch Garten.

After half a mile, cross the road into a small parking area, signed 'Loch Garten' and 'Loch Mallachie'.

The trail passes through trees, with occasional glimpses of the loch. Closer to shore, look out for bank voles, grazing roe deer, teetering common sandpiper and blinking frogs. Go right where the track splits, continuing south through the rare bog woodland, where the trees' stunted size belies their age.

2 GOLDENEYE DANCE

As the track U-bends, an ideal vantage point opens over the rust-coloured waters of Loch Mallachie. There's a nest box for goldeneye ducks on the nearest island – search for displaying males

out on the water, vigorously throwing their heads back.

The path undulates back north through the Caledonian woods. Look out for red squirrels and listen for the trilling call of crested tits.

3 GRANNY PINES

Before you reunite with the path back to the car park, keep an eye out for the nests of wood ants. These huge pine-needle piles, often located at the base of decaying tree stumps, can serve as navigational aids – their southern side is flatter, which increases their surface area to absorb more heat.

4 WINGED WONDERS

Cross the Boat House car park and head up the linear Big Pines trail, guarded by the gigantic 'granny' Scots pines.

Your final destination is the Loch Garten Osprey Centre. The centre offers a chance to spot these mesmerising birds as they return to Scotland in spring and summer to breed. There are also opportunities for close encounters with siskins, chaffinches and great spotted woodpeckers, as well as the UK's only endemic bird, the Scottish crossbill. Though hard to discern from the common crossbill, mating studies have proven that they are indeed a different species – it's all in the size of the bill, apparently.



ELEVATION PROFILE



MAP ROUTE

Scan here to access this route on your mobile device.





Aber Falls Gwynedd

Wander through a lush valley in Snowdonia to discover one of Wales' most dramatic waterfalls. By **Dorothy Hamilton**



DISTANCE: 4.2 MILES/6.8KM **TIME:** 2.5–3 HOURS

LEVEL: MODERATE **ASCENT:** 198M

TERRAIN: Woodland paths, firm tracks and rough pasture.

There are some stream crossings and one or two short but steep sections, so walking boots are essential.



08



Rhaeadr Fawr, known commonly as Aber Falls, lives up to its name. Meaning 'big waterfall' in Welsh, it spills over a tree-shrouded ledge in the north of the Carneddau mountains, falling 37m into the river valley below. So powerful are the cascades that they create their own microclimate, filling the air with moisture and offering the humidity required for a range of moss, liverwort, fern and lichen species to flourish.

The fresh growth that appears in the woodlands and grasslands in spring adds to the lushness of the landscape, making it the perfect season to set out on a four-mile circular walk to these spectacular waterfalls.

LEFT Glacial action resulted in the build-up of rock fragments, known as moraine, at the base of the falls

1 WOODLAND WANDER

Park at Bont Newydd and pass through the kissing gate into Coedydd Aber Nature Reserve. Follow the path beside Afon Rhaeadr-Fawr, where dippers bob on the river boulders, before arriving at a bench embellished with carvings of the local wildlife.

Further on, cross a footbridge and pass through a gate. Bear right alongside oak, birch and hazel woodlands – a good habitat for spring songbirds. At an information board, follow the track ahead.

After a steep section, there are glimpses of the waterfall at the head of the valley. Ignore a path on the left to soon reach the visitor centre.

2 STEEP INCLINE

Continue along the track, passing a fenced-off enclosure containing the foundations of a recently excavated Iron Age roundhouse. In the far corner are the remains of a more recent kiln and a standing stone. Pass below a scree-strewn hillside to the rocks below the 37m-high Aber Falls, at their most impressive after heavy rainfall. The river boasts one of the steepest gradients from source to sea in England and Wales.

3 NORTH WALES PATH

From the falls, retrace your steps briefly and cross a footbridge

over the river to take the path uphill to a viewpoint of the dramatic falls.

Walk back to the fence and climb a stile to continue along the North Wales Path. Look out for ravens, buzzards and peregrines in the skies above you. After crossing a footbridge at a lesser waterfall, the path veers north, crosses a few streams, then heads uphill to a great viewpoint. If you are lucky you may spot Carneddau ponies on the slopes. These semi-wild Celtic ponies have lived on these rugged mountains for hundreds of years.

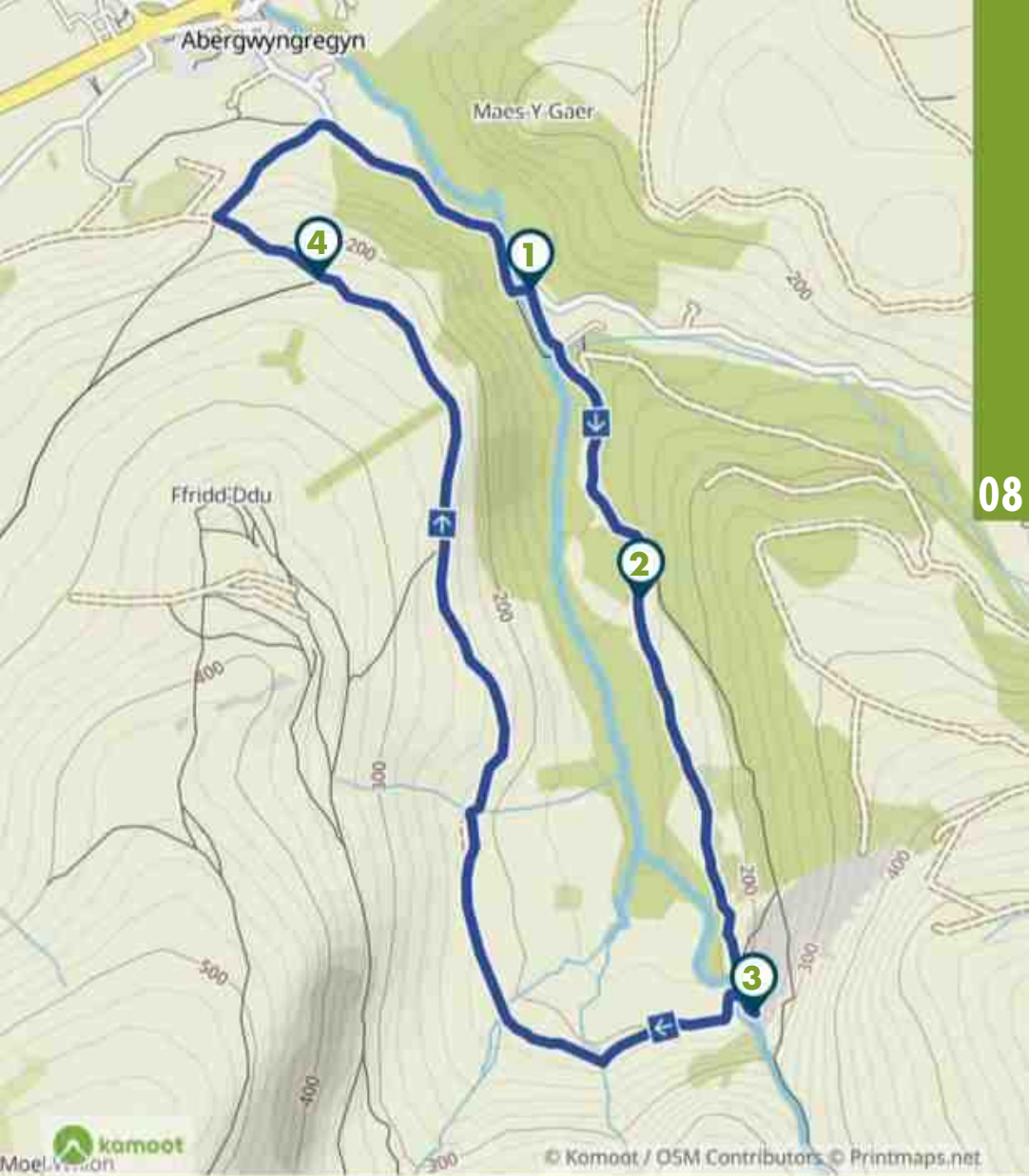
Follow the clear path along the hillside and, at a waymark, take the path indicated to rejoin the wider path. Continue along it and you will pass a plantation and a metal farm building to reach a fork in the track.

4 MEDIEVAL MOUND

Leave the North Wales Path and take the right-hand, stony track downhill. Just before it enters trees, go right on a waymarked path and descend the steep hillside.

In a small field near houses you can see a conspicuous mound with a flat top. A wooden keep, built by either the Normans or one of the Welsh princes, once stood on this medieval motte.

At the bottom of the hill, pass through the gate on to a lane. Go right to the car park or, for refreshments, go left to Yr Hen Felin.



ELEVATION PROFILE



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Forest of Dean Gloucestershire

Pedal through a fabled forest where wild boar roam among swathes of flowering bluebells. By **Abigail Whyte**



Wild boar piglets are born in spring – chances are you'll spot signs of them in mud and track verges before you see them on the Family Cycle Trail



DISTANCE: 9.7 MILES/15.4KM

TIME: 1.5–2.5 HOURS

LEVEL: EASY–MODERATE **ASCENT:** 137M

TERRAIN: Mostly gravel surfaces with one or two hills; cycled clockwise, most of the climbing is done early on.



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Sightings of stout, bristly haired boars are becoming more frequent in the ancient Forest of Dean. They've made a home here, growing in numbers since a group escaped from a farm in the 1990s, followed by an illegal release in 2004. No one knows for sure how many there are, but signs of them are everywhere, from wallow pits in the mud and tusk-scarred trees to churned-up grass verges.

Keep quiet and you may spot these rotavating mammals, as well as deer, foraging among mats of bluebells. The forest is also home to pied and spotted flycatchers, wood warblers and redstarts, as well as elusive, nocturnal nightjars.

The 10-mile-long Family Cycle Trail is one of the best routes in the forest, following waymarkers along the old Severn and Wye railway line, passing time-worn stations and former collieries through enchanting ancient woodland.

1 STEELY DEER

Start at the Pedalabikeaway cycle centre in the oak-wooded Cannop Valley. Cross the bridge over the road and follow the trail as

Stop for a picnic and watch swans, ducks and geese on the ponds

it heads uphill – it's not too strenuous, but will give your thighs an early workout. Keep your eyes peeled on your right for a deer sculpture among the trees, made entirely from steel rods and wire. After you pass under a horseshoe-shaped bridge, you'll soon come to Drybrook Road Station.

2 INDUSTRY OF OLD

If you're cycling with children and the full 10 miles seems a bit of a stretch, you can turn right here for the Hicksters Way Loop – a five-mile route back to the cycle centre. Otherwise, continue straight ahead.

Cycling among the light-green oaks, beeches, larches and sweet



ABOVE The Family Cycle Trail is just one of many cycle routes in the forest

chestnuts, it's easy to forget that this land has been shaped by industry, from tree-felling for shipbuilding in the 16th century to coal mining in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Relics of this past are dotted throughout the forest, including the former Lightmoor Colliery at Foxes Bridge, which closed in 1930. You'll pass this old colliery, then another at New Fancy.

3 STEP INTO THE MAP

From the old spoil heap lookout, enjoy spectacular views across the treetops – you might even see a buzzard or goshawk soaring above. The vista also has a Geomap – a fascinating walk-on map that depicts the underlying geology, mines and quarries of the forest. From here, it's a thrilling descent, filled with twists and turns. You'll pass a mighty oak tree, where men from the local collieries used to gather for their union meetings.

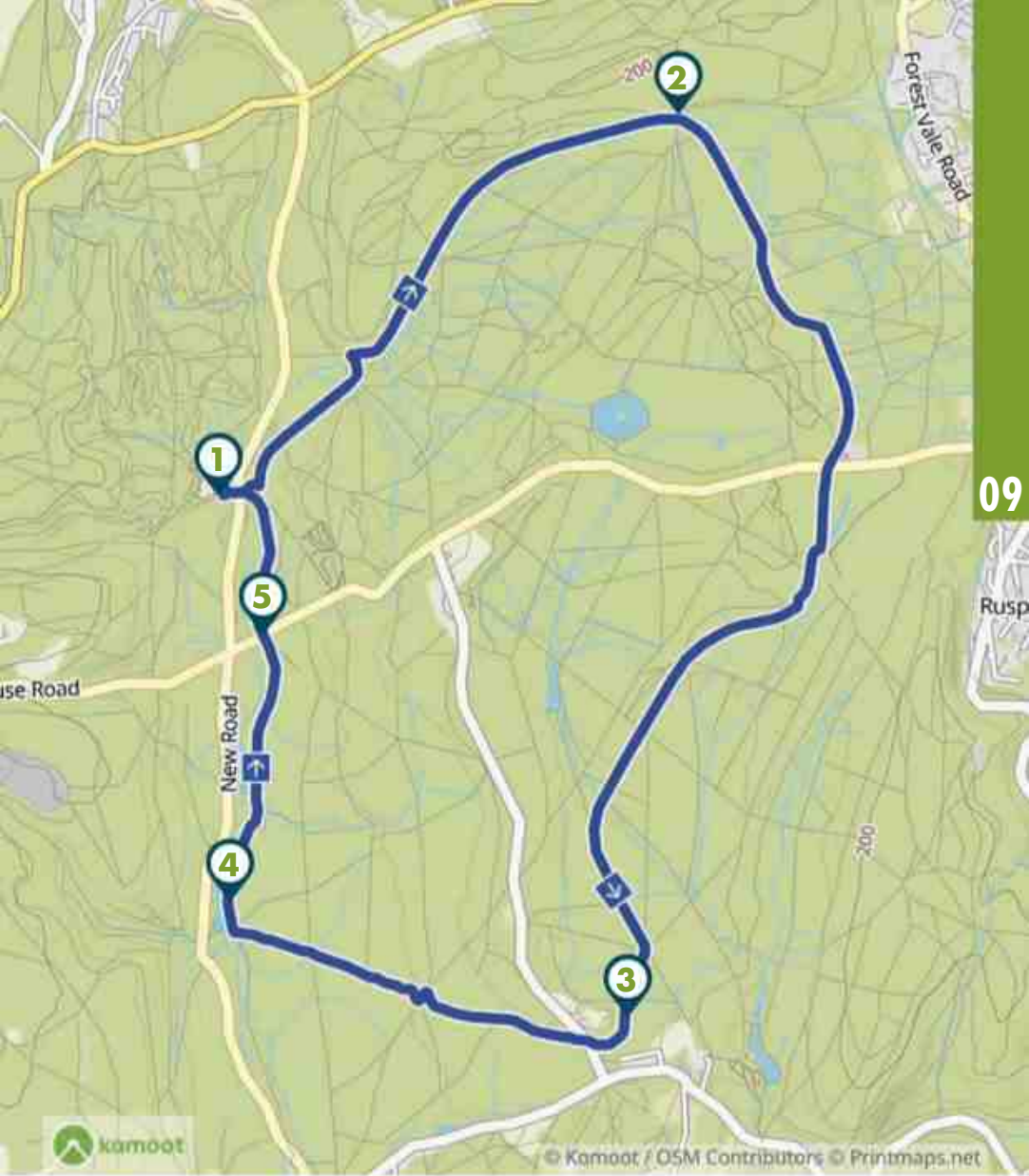
4 LUNCH STOP

Soon you'll reach Cannop Ponds, created to power a huge waterwheel at Parkend Ironworks a couple of miles away. It's an idyllic spot to stop for a picnic and watch swans, mandarin ducks and geese. Dragonflies and damselflies bob among the reeds, while butterflies, including the wood white and small pearl-bordered fritillary, search for food in the woodland rides.

5 FOREST PROTECTION

When you reach Speech House Road station, get off your bike to cross the street. The station's namesake, Speech House, now a hotel, was originally built as a hunting lodge for King Charles II in 1669. Verderers Court, a room in the house where judgments took place over 300 years ago, is now a fine-dining restaurant. Judicial officers, known as Verderers, dealt with shady behaviour in the forest, including the poaching of deer and illegal cutting of woodland. Today, regular verderers meetings are still held at Speech House to discuss management of the vert (woodlands and open land), deer and, of course, the mischievous wild boar.

Cross the road bridge again and head back to the cycle centre where you can rest your weary legs in a café buzzing with mountain bikers.



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ELEVATION PROFILE



MAP ROUTE

Scan here to access this route on your mobile device.






Ullswater Cumbria

Board a historic steamer then trace the lake shore on one of Wainwright's most-loved paths. **By Adrienne Wyper**

Alfred Wainwright called this walk along Ullswater's south shore "the most beautiful and rewarding in Lakeland".

Only accessible by boot or boat, the route meanders through woods and over hills with the rising skyline of the Helvellyn Range to the south. 



In May and June, bluebells flower on the slopes above nine-mile-long Ullswater, the second largest waterbody in the Lake District

DISTANCE: BOAT: 4.8 MILES/7.7KM | WALK: 6.6 MILES/10.7KM
TIME: 4–4.5 HOURS **LEVEL:** MODERATE **ASCENT:** 198M
TERRAIN: After a relaxing boat journey, an undulating path skirts to the lake shore with some steep sections. Path is rocky and rooted in places.



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ABOVE The Ullswater ‘Steamers’ company was founded in 1855

1 ALL ABOARD

The cruises run by Ullswater ‘Steamers’ have been running for over 160 years, connecting various points along the lake’s 20-mile shoreline. The most southerly landing point is the quaint village of Glenridding – it’s here that this journey begins. Starting your day by boarding this historic ferry means you don’t have to worry about missing it at the end, so relax and enjoy the 35-minute boat ride to Howtown and the start of your walk. The views from the boat are fabulous. On the left shore is Glencoyne Wood, where Wordsworth saw those daffodils.

2 COOLING DIP

In need of sustenance? Disembark the Ullswater ferry at Howtown pier and head to the stone-walled Howtown Hotel tearoom (turn right on the road by the pier), serving sandwiches,

soup, sausage rolls and cakes. To rejoin the way, take the track opposite the hotel turn-off.

Follow the signs to Sandwick. If you’ve worked up a sweat, you can jump off the rocks at Kailpot Crag and swim at Sandwick Bay. Follow the narrow, rocky, rooted path into Hallinagh Wood, passing three poetry-inscribed stones.

At Sandwick Bay, turn inland, crossing a beck to skirt Scalehow Wood. The path climbs as Scalehow Force waterfall gushes down, before curving right to the shore.

This straightish section to Silver Bay, another paddling point, gives expansive lake and islet views. Damselflies flicker above the water’s surface, and overhead you may spot nesting peregrine falcons.

One of the UK’s oldest herds of red deer roams the slopes of Place Fell; you’ll hear them bellowing later in the year in the rutting season.

3 LAST LEG

Turn right at Side Farm, across the green fields of the Patterdale Valley and over Grisedale Beck to the A592. To refuel, continue to the village centre for Helvellyn Country Kitchen’s burgers, wraps, salads, soup and sandwiches; Fellbites’ substantial sandwiches, including Cumberland sausage, or Let It Brew’s toasted baguettes, coffee, local ice cream and cake.



ELEVATION PROFILE



MAP ROUTE

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