



The Wildlife Trust for
**Lancashire
Manchester &
North Merseyside**

Your North West Wildlife Year

WHAT TO SEE AND WHEN ACROSS LANCASHIRE,
MANCHESTER AND NORTH MERSEYSIDE



www.lancswt.org.uk

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Image: Andy Rouse/2020VISION
Cover image: Amy Lewis

It's fair to say that the North West of England is often overlooked as a wildlife hotspot, the skyline still dotted with towering mill chimneys that serve as a reminder of an intensely industrial past. But our region is so much more than that. Nature is reclaiming woodlands formerly dominated by bleach works, old quarries have become havens for rare birds and butterflies, and our mosslands are being helped on the road to recovery from peat exploitation.

The North West is brimming with grassland, woodlands, wetlands, mosslands, marshes, coasts and uplands that are homes for a whole array of creatures, from ghostly barn owls to rare bog bush crickets. As your local wildlife charity, we work to protect and restore a huge range of these habitats right across Lancashire, Greater Manchester and North Merseyside, in turn safeguarding the incredible plants and animals that depend on these landscapes to survive.

Each season in the North West brings its own wildlife spectacles, and you'd be madder than a March hare to miss them. From beautiful carpets of bluebells to otherworldly starling murmurations, here is what to see, and when, across our magical region.

Winter

Winter in the North West is anything but lifeless. Wading birds gather in huge, noisy flocks to forage along coasts and marshes, while starlings take to the skies in hypnotic murmurations.

It might be the toughest time of year, but even our winter wildlife is blessed with northern grit.



Image: Danny Green/2020VISION

December

Starling murmuration

These hypnotic aerobatics peak in December when an influx of birds from Eastern Europe and Russia swells our own flocks.

Murmurations are thought to form a defence against predators that struggle to lock onto a single bird in the twirling, swirling group.

Where to see them:

- Brockholes Nature Reserve, Preston
- North Pier, Blackpool
- Lunt Meadows, Sefton
- RSPB Leighton Moss, Silverdale



Winter waders

Every year our own wading birds are joined by almost 3 million waders from overseas, including lapwings, dunlin, knot, oystercatchers, bar-tailed godwits, redshanks and grey plovers.

Many of these birds end up in the North West, jostling for position on our coasts, mudflats, marshes and lakes; filling the air with an excitable chorus of peeping, squeaking and bubbling.

Where to see them:

- Barnaby's Sands and Burrows Marsh, Knott End
- Mere Sands Wood, Ormskirk
- Seaforth Nature Reserve, Liverpool
- Wigan Flashes, Wigan
- Lunt Meadows, Sefton



January

Sphagnum moss

This living carpet is a year-round wonder of nature blanketing mosslands, heaths and moors. It can soak up more than eight times its own weight in water, helping to alleviate flooding

You can see sphagnum moss throughout the year, but winter is a great time to combine a moss-hunt with an atmospheric walk. There is something bleakly beautiful about frosty, misty moorland strolls.

Where to see it:

- Highfield Moss, Wigan
- Cadishead and Little Woollen Moss
- Heysham Moss, Morecambe



Only 2% of our mosslands remain across Lancashire, Greater Manchester and North Merseyside

Bitterns braving the chill

This prehistoric-looking bird stands frozen in the reeds, hidden by tawny camouflage until, finally, it blinks, or skulks silently out along the reed-line on the hunt for food.

With water freezing over and food becoming scarcer, bitterns often break cover during winter, venturing out onto the ice to find something to eat.

Where to see them:

- Mere Sands Wood, Ormskirk
- Brockholes Nature Reserve, Preston
- Wigan Flashes, Wigan
- RSPB Leighton Moss, Silverdale

February

Redwings and fieldfares

These beautiful thrushes fly here from Scandinavia, arriving from October onwards to feast on the bountiful berries decorating our trees and hedgerows.

Redwings and fieldfares will often flock together and form huge foraging groups, so keep your eyes peeled around berry-laden trees and bushes.

Where to see them:

- Haskayne Cutting, Ormskirk
- Brockholes Nature Reserve, Preston
- Mere Sands Wood, Ormskirk



Short-eared owls

Did you know that Northern England is a real stronghold for short-eared owls? You can see them here throughout the year, but during winter there is an influx of birds from Scandinavia, Russia and Iceland, making it even easier to spot one.

There is no mistaking those bright yellow eyes; they seem to glow like headlights as the owls hunt for small mammals over coastal and wetland areas.

Short-eared owls tend to move to lower ground during winter, but keep your eyes peeled during chilly upland walks as you never know what you might see.

Where to see them:

- Lunt Meadows, Sefton

Spring



Spring heralds a great re-awakening in the North West. Flowers unfurl fresh new petals, the dawn chorus chimes up with tantalising new notes from migrant birds, and the sun catches the buds of trees waiting to reveal verdant new bunches of leaves.

Many would argue that this new beginning marks the most wonderful time of the year.

Image: Katrina Martin/2020VISION

March

Boxing hares

These 'mad March hares' fly into a flurry of boxing paws and flying fur, but the competitors aren't two rival males – it is a female hare fending off an overly amorous male.

Be on the lookout for a boxing match early in the morning, in an area of open grass close to hedgerows or trees where the hares can shelter.

Where to see them:

- Brockholes Nature Reserve, Preston
- Cadishead & Little Woollen Moss, Irlam

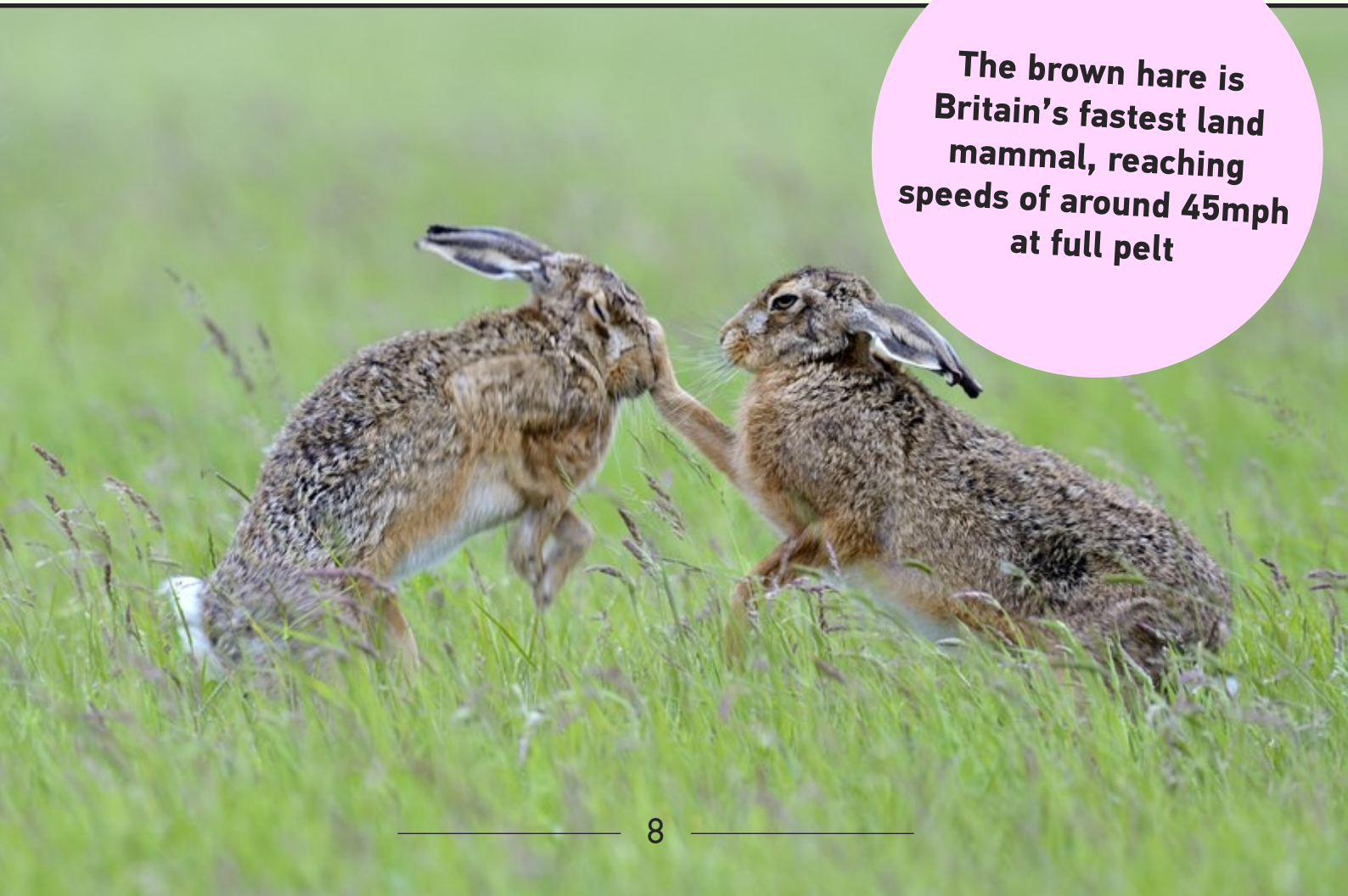
Spawning frogs

The first mild, damp spring days mark a mass exodus of frogs as they hop out of hibernation and into their breeding pools. Some waters are taken over by hundreds of loudly croaking frogs jostling for position among ever-growing clumps of spawn. It isn't uncommon to spot more than one male frog trying to cling to the back of a female!

Where to spot them:

- Moston Fairway, Manchester
- Brockholes Nature Reserve, Preston
- Cutacre, Wigan
- Over Kellet Pond, Carnforth

The brown hare is Britain's fastest land mammal, reaching speeds of around 45mph at full pelt



April

Courting grebes

There is no sight like a pair of great crested grebes dancing their courtship ritual across misty, mirror-like water.

The pair head-shake and bill-dip before rushing towards each other, feet frantically paddling until they are upright, chest-to-chest, circling and flicking beaks full of water weed at each other.

Where to see them:

- Mere Sands Wood, Ormskirk
- Wigan Flashes, Wigan



Bluebell woods

The UK is home to more than half the world's population of bluebells, which are one of the indicators of ancient woodland.

Between April and May, nature lays vibrant carpets of bluebells along the woodland floor. As sunlight filters through the trees above, bright shafts of sunlight highlight fresh, lime-green leaves and throw spotlights onto azure, gently nodding flower heads.

Where to see them:

- Boilton Wood (Brockholes Nature Reserve), Preston
- Aughton Woods, Aughton
- Warton Crag, Carnforth

May

Wild garlic

In April and May, the woodlands of the North West are awash with the white, starry flowers and unmistakable fragrance of wild garlic, also known as ramsons.

Wild garlic is one of the easiest things to forage and cook with – why not use the leaves to make a delicious pesto?



Where to see it:

- Ringley Woods, Radcliffe
- Towneley Park, Burnley
- Dean Wood, Chorley

Lounging lizards

The UK's three lizard species can be found right here in Lancashire, Manchester and North Merseyside. They emerge at the start of spring to bask in the sunshine and mate, with sand lizards laying their eggs in sandy burrows, and common lizards and slow worms giving birth to live young that have hatched inside their bodies.

Where to see them:

- Freshfield Dune Heath, Formby (common lizard, sand lizard)
- Warton Crag, Carnforth (common lizard, slow worm)
- Cadishead & Little Woollen Moss, Irlam (common lizard)
- Haskayne Cutting, Ormskirk (common lizard)



Summer



The North West's halcyon summer days are a riot of birdsong, baby animals and skies filled with swooping and soaring migrants. Flower-heads thrum with buzzing bees and fluttering butterflies, and the inevitable rainstorms only make the landscape glow brighter.

All life is here, and it is waiting to be explored.

Image: Chris Gomersall/2020VISION

June

Summer migrants

A spring influx of migrant birds from overseas fills the summer sky with the swooping and spinning silhouettes of swifts, swallows, house martins and sand martins. Sitting and listening to the joyful screaming of swifts is one life's great pleasures, but don't forget to look towards the ground, too. Swallows and martins streak across fields and bodies of water, snatching insects from the air.

Changes in farming have made skylark populations crash. They are now a Red List species of conservation concern



Where to see them:

- Brockholes Nature Reserve, Preston
- Cross Hill Quarry, Clitheroe
- Heysham Nature Reserve, Morecambe
- Seaforth, Liverpool

Skylark song

You'll hear a skylark before you see it; the air tinkling with a joyful song spouted forth as the bird flies high up in the sky. These song-flights can last from several minutes to an hour and reach 300m before the skylark falls back to earth.

Where to see them:

- Cutacre, Wigan
- Barnaby's Sands and Burrows Marsh, Knott End
- Cadishead & Little Woolden Moss, Irlam

July

March of the toadlets

The annual march of toadlets leaving their birth ponds for the first time is something to behold. As they move en-masse to pastures new, the ground itself seems to jump and ripple with the sheer number of leaping amphibians, so watch your feet!

Where to see them:

- Brockholes Nature Reserve, Preston
- Wigan Flashes, Wigan
- Haskayne Cutting, Ormskirk



Wildflower meadows

Did you know that the UK has lost 97% of its wildflower meadows since WWII? Lancashire's wildflower meadows will take your breath away with kaleidoscopic colour. Bee orchids and marsh helleborine are two of the rarer plants you could see complimented by devil's-bit scabious, cowslips, ox-eye daisies and many more. With such a diversity of plant life on offer, these meadows literally buzz with bees, butterflies and day-flying moths throughout spring and summer.

Where to see them:

- Heysham Nature Reserve, Morcambe
- Mere Sands Wood, Ormskirk
- Freeman's Pasture, Charnock Richard
- Salthill Quarry, Clitheroe

August

Bat feeding frenzy

Have you ever stood beneath a group of feeding bats? You'll be awestruck by their aerobatics; entranced by the speedy twists and sharp turns they pull in hot pursuit of insects. Take a bat detector and you'll hear a distinctive 'raspberry' sound as they catch something.

Look out for Daubenton's bats hunting over water.

Where to see them:

- Brockholes Nature Reserve, Preston
- Wigan Flashes, Wigan
- Cross Hill Quarry, Clitheroe

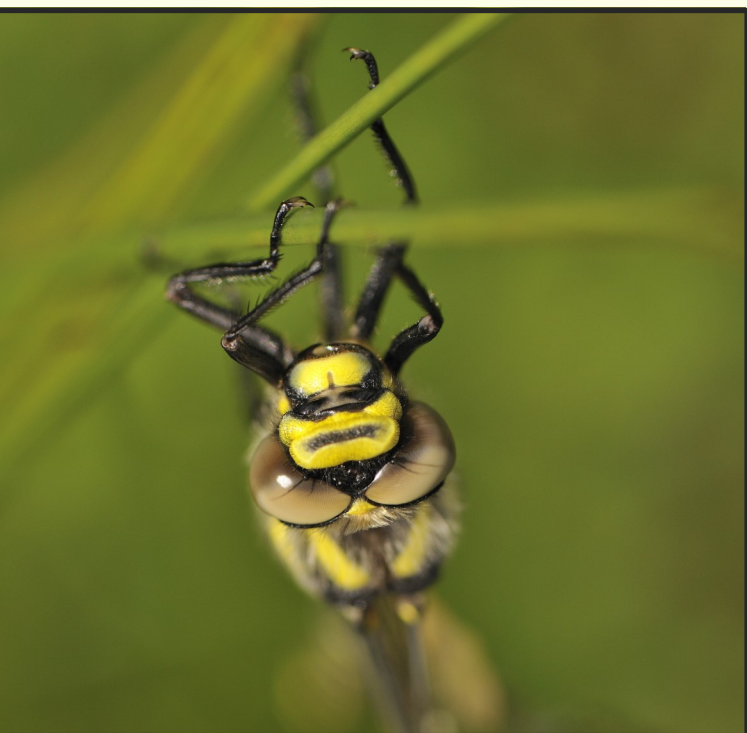


Dragonfly armies

Twisting and turning like fighter jets, masses of dragonflies hunting on blissfully sunny days is one of summer's great thrills. Their aerial manoeuvres rival even the fastest military aircraft as they swoop in pursuit of prey, or duck to avoid the clutches of hungry hobbies. Incredibly adaptable, dragonflies fill everything from woodland glades and moorlands to reservoirs and ponds with the helicopter-thrum of whirring wings.

Where to see them:

- Middleton Nature Reserve, Heysham
- Brockholes Nature Reserve, Preston
- Wigan Flashes, Wigan
- Moston Fairway, Manchester



Autumn

As the golden glow of autumn sets fiery leaves alight, nature shows no sign of slowing down. Berries burst forth from the bushes, birds and mammals gorge on the autumn bounty and summer migrants leave for Africa, making way for must-see winter birds. It's time to wrap up and start exploring.

Image: Ross Hoddinott/2020VISION

September

Flowering heather

Drizzly, foggy moorlands have their own bleak beauty, but don't miss the blazing purple blanket of freshly flowering heather during autumn, too.

The delicate flowers unfurl during August and September, creating a stunning spectacle for us and an important foraging opportunity for upland pollinators like the bilberry bumblebee and green hairstreak butterfly.

75% of the world's heather moors are found in the UK. They are vital for merlins, short-eared owls, hen harriers, golden plovers and emperor moths

Where to see it:

- Longridge Fell, Forest of Bowland
- Darwen Moor, Blackburn
- Angelzarke Moor, Chorley
- RSPB Dove Stone, Greenfield

Fly agaric

The famous fairy toadstool springs up from the ground across our region between August and November. Keep your eyes peeled in parks and woodlands beneath birch and pine trees.

Where to see it:

- Mere Sands Wood, Ormskirk
- Brinscall Woods, Chorley
- Beacon Fell Country Park, Forest of Bowland

October

Squawking jays

You are more likely to hear a jay than see one, their throaty squawk echoing around the trees. But come autumn, jays head out into the open to gather fallen acorns which they'll bury in preparation for winter. You may spot them foraging under oak trees or flying overhead, calling as they go. Look out for their distinctive, magpie-like silhouette, minus the long tail.

Where to see them:

- Cuerden Valley Park, Bamber Bridge
- Mere Sands Wood, Ormskirk
- Brockholes Nature Reserve, Preston

Where to see it:

- Scour your local parks, woodlands, fields and other wild places, but make sure you know what you are looking for before picking



The berry glut

As summer turns to autumn, bushes and hedgerows grow fat with blackberries, rosehips, elderberries and sloes: invaluable food sources for birds, mammals and insects that gorge on their sweetness before winter.

October is also a great time for us to get out foraging, picking sparingly and leaving enough for wildlife. Blackberries are best picked after the first frost, or picked and then frozen before being turned into delicious jams and desserts.

November

Autumn woodlands

The season of mists and mellow fruitfulness transforms our woodlands into fiery wonderlands. But the breath-taking canopy isn't the only reason to visit an autumn woodland. Look for thrushes and blackbirds enjoying the berry crop, and squawking jays burying acorns for winter.

Where to see them:

- Mere Sands Wood, Ormskirk
- Brockholes Nature Reserve, Preston
- Aughton Woods, Lancaster

Red squirrels

These tough little mammals brave all but the harshest weather. Autumn is a great time to see them as they spend more time out in the open, gathering food to cache for the gruelling months ahead.

The best days for squirrel spotting are calm, dry and quiet. Look for signs like nibbled pine cones, and keep your eyes peeled around bird feeding stations.

Where to see them:

- Mere Sands Wood, Ormskirk
- Freshfield Dune Heath, Formby
- National Trust Formby, Liverpool

Red squirrel numbers have declined from around 3.5 million to just 140,000 in less than 150 years



We'd like to thank the following photographers for making their incredible images available for use in this guide:

Amy Lewis

Andy Rouse/2020VISION

Danny Green/2020VISION

Guy Edwardes

Chris Gomersall/2020VISION

Mark Hamblin/2020VISION

Jon Hawkins – Surrey Hills Photography

Katrina Martin/2020VISION

Andrew Parkinson/2020VISION

Ross Hoddinott/2020VISION

Stefan Johansson

Dale Sutton/2020VISION

Fergus Gill/2020VISION

Peter Cairns/2020VISION

Jamie Hall

Show wildlife what it means to you

From colourful wildflower meadows and fascinating moss forests to beautiful owls and joyfully screaming swifts, being surrounded by the wonders of nature makes us happier and healthier.

But sadly this isn't the case everywhere in our region. Have you noticed fewer butterflies and birds where you live?

Habitat loss, climate change and changes in agriculture have resulted in a 56% decline in UK wildlife, but you can make a difference. We receive no government funding and need your help to continue protecting wildlife and wild places across Lancashire, Manchester and North Merseyside.

Become a member today and help your local wildlife blossom.

———— www.lancswt.org.uk ————



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Image: Jamie Hall