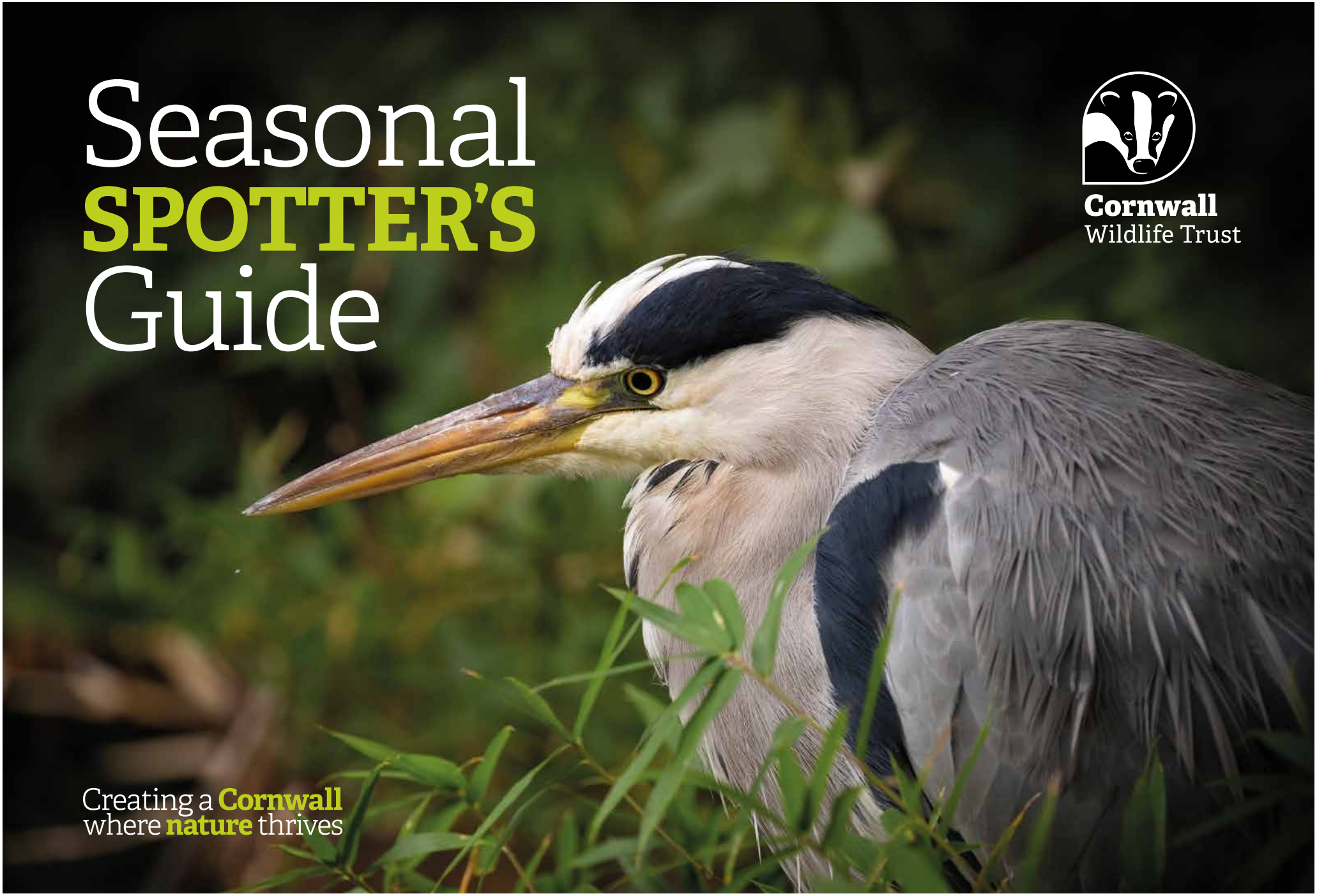
Seasonal SPOTTER'S Guide



Cornwall Wildlife Trust

Creating a **Cornwall** where **nature** thrives

Welcome to Cornwall



Matt Wallpole
Chief Executive
Cornwall Wildlife Trust

Few places offer such a rich tapestry of habitats in so compact an area as our incredible county. From rugged coasts to rolling farmland, heathland, and ancient woodland, Cornwall's landscapes support an extraordinary diversity of species throughout the year.

There is always something to see, and each season brings its own rewards. In spring, our ponds and wetlands come alive, while hedgerows and verges burst into colour and song. Summer brings heathlands and meadows painted with wildflowers and buzzing with life, alongside long bright days exploring rockpools and the ocean. Autumn draws us in to look for the treasures found within the shelter of woodlands and sand dunes, while in winter coastlines and estuaries offer potential for dramatic wildlife encounters.

Wildlife spotting is not just a pleasure - it is a powerful way to connect with nature, improve our wellbeing, and deepen our understanding of the world around us. By recording and sharing your sightings with us, you can also play a vital role in helping us track changes in species populations and protect Cornwall's unique natural heritage.

We hope this guide inspires you to step outside, look closer, and discover more of the wildlife that surrounds you in every season.



COVER IMAGE, HERON: **JON HAWKINS SURREY HILLS PHOTOGRAPHY** | ABOVE, A PAIR OF CORNISH CHOUGHS: **LISA MACLEOD**

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While we've picked some featured habitats to explore each season, some of the species below can be found elsewhere too, **so keep your eyes peeled!**

USE THIS PAGE AS A HANDY CHECKLIST ✔





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Check out your **Wild Places Reserves Guide** for inspiration on where to visit and reserves-specific species.

More seasonal spotter's information can also be found in our *Wild Cornwall* magazine: **cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk/wild-cornwall-magazine**

and on our website: **cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk/seasonalspottersguide**



ADDER: **DANNY GREEN/2020VISION** | FLY AGARIC: **JON HAWKINS SURREY HILLS PHOTOGRAPHY**

WHAT TO SPOT IN SPRING

Spring brings a welcome shift in energy as daylight lengthens, temperatures rise, and the landscape comes alive with fresh colour. New leaves unfurl, early blossoms brighten lanes and gardens, and insects and birds become more active as the season gathers pace. It's a time of new life and renewed activity across Cornwall's countryside.

Amphibians return to the water to breed, early insects take to the air, and migrating birds fill the hedges with song. With a little patience, these seasonal changes reveal some fascinating wildlife.

PONDS & WETLANDS

1 PALMATE NEWT

Cornwall's only native species of newt, the palmate newt breeds in ponds and wetlands in spring. Males develop black webbed hind feet and a fine tail filament for their courtship dance. Eggs are tiny and individually folded into leaves. After breeding, juveniles leave the water and shelter under damp logs and stones.

2 GREY HERON

Grey herons stand motionless in shallow water, waiting to spear passing fish, frogs or unwary pond life. These tall, grey birds nest together in treetop colonies and are striking in flight, with long legs trailing behind. They're frequent visitors to wetlands and even garden ponds in search of an easy meal.

3 DAUBENTON'S BAT

Often seen at dusk, the Daubenton's bat skims low over ponds and streams, taking midges and mayflies with its feet or tail. It roosts nearby in bridges, tunnels, and tree holes, and females form maternity groups in summer. It has brown fur, pale underparts, and a pinkish face.

4 LARGE RED DAMSELFLY

One of the first damselflies of spring, the large red damselfly appears around pond edges from late April. Males are vivid red with a black thorax; females show more black. Often resting on emergent vegetation, they patrol wetlands and are also regular visitors to garden ponds.









PALMATE NEWT: **PHILIP PRECEY** | GREY HERON: **BERTIE GREGORY/2020VISION** | DAUBENTON'S BAT: **DALE SUTTON** | LARGE RED DAMSELFLY: **RICHARD BURKMARR**

WHAT TO SPOT IN SPRING



5

HEDGES & VERGES

5 ORANGE-TIP

Males flash bright orange wingtips as they patrol hedges and verges in spring. Females are white with a mossy green pattern beneath the wings. Butterflies lay single eggs cuckooflowers or garlic mustard - the caterpillars are cannibalistic so it's best to keep the eggs separate!

6 OIL BEETLE

Oil beetles are slow, shiny beetles with shortened wing cases and swollen abdomens. Females lay thousands of eggs in burrows along path edges. Their larvae hitch rides on solitary bees to reach a nest and feed there until emerging the following spring. Both black and violet species occur in Cornwall.

7 WHITETHROAT

Arriving from Africa in April, whitethroats sing from hedges and scrubby verges. Males have grey heads, rusty wing edges, and bright white throats. They build the first version of the nest for females to inspect. Families fledge through summer before migrating south again in early autumn.

8 EARLY PURPLE ORCHID

One of the first orchids of spring, the early purple orchid rises from spotted leaves to produce a spike of pinkish purple flowers. Found along shady hedges and verges, its blooms start pleasantly scented but become stronger after pollination. The flowers appear from April, often alongside bluebells.



7



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HELP NATURE THE SPRING

Spring is the perfect time to make your garden or outdoor space more wildlife friendly. Even small changes can provide lifelines for species that are struggling to find suitable habitat elsewhere.

Why not let your garden grow wild? Anything from a single pot of wildflowers to a full flowerbed or corner of unmown grass. Native wildflowers offer essential food and shelter for a wide range of insects, many of which can't thrive in urban areas without these small pockets of habitat. As a bonus, leaving areas to grow wild means fewer fossil fuel powered tools like lawnmowers.

If space allows, you could also create a garden pond. Frogs and other amphibians now rely heavily on garden ponds, and even a small one can make a huge difference.

No matter the type of space you have - pots, gravel, lawns or even vertical surfaces - there are countless easy ways to welcome more wildlife.

TAKE ACTION FOR WILDLIFE

Our *Actions for Wildlife* page is full of tips and ideas to help you get started and make your outdoor space a haven for nature this spring. **cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk/actions**



6

OIL BEETLE: **VAUGHN MATTHEWS** | WHITETHROAT: **JON HAWKINS SURREY HILLS PHOTOGRAPHY** | EARLY PURPLE ORCHID: **JIM HIGHAM**

WHAT TO SPOT IN SUMMER



The long, sun soaked days of summer bring an abundance of colour, from bright meadow flowers to the rich purples of heathland. Insects hum through the warm air, birds fill scrub and grassland with song, and coastlines bustle with life above and below the waves.

As the season reaches its peak, heathlands and meadows become hotspots for butterflies, moths, and hunting reptiles, while rockpools and coastal waters reveal crabs, starfish, and energetic dolphins. With warm weather and thriving wildlife, summer is the perfect time to explore and enjoy the natural world at its busiest.

HEATHLAND & MEADOWS

1 ADDER

The adder is the UK's only venomous snake and is most often spotted basking on heathland in warm weather. Stocky and grey or brown with a bold zigzag stripe, it preys on small mammals and reptiles. Shy by nature, adders prefer to slip away if left undisturbed.

2 DEVIL'S-BIT SCABIOUS

Flowering from July to autumn, Devil's-bit scabious has lilac-blue pincushion-like heads that attract bees and butterflies. It's especially important for the marsh fritillary, whose caterpillars feed on the leaves. Its nodding blooms bring colour to damp meadows and provide valuable nectar late in the season.

3 CINNABAR

Cinnabar moths are striking day-flying moths with black wings marked by bold red bars. Their yellow and black caterpillars feed on ragwort, absorbing its toxins to become poisonous to predators. After overwintering as cocoons, adults emerge in summer and are often mistaken for butterflies because of their bright colours.

4 GRASSHOPPER WARBLER

More often heard than seen, the grasshopper warbler gives a long, insect-like reeling song that can be hard to pinpoint. This secretive migrant arrives in spring to breed in dense vegetation. Brown and elusive, it feeds on insects and has declined significantly due to the loss of suitable breeding habitat.







ADDER: **DANNY GREEN/2020VISION** | DEVIL'S-BIT SCABIOUS: **VAUGHN MATTHEWS** | GRASSHOPPER WARBLER: **AMY LEWIS**

WHAT TO SPOT IN SUMMER

ROCKPOOLS & OCEAN



5 SPINY SPIDER CRAB

Large groups of spider crabs gather in late summer to moult, shedding their hard shells and becoming vulnerable, so they rely on safety in numbers. These long legged, spiny crabs are orange, often with algae-covered shells, and feed on seaweed, starfish, and shellfish. Keep your eyes peeled next time you go for a snokel, or look out for their moults which often wash up on beaches.

6 COMMON DOLPHIN

Common dolphins are highly social and often seen bow riding boats or leaping from the water. Slender with a distinctive yellow-cream hourglass pattern on their sides, they work together to herd fish into tight shoals. Though usually offshore, they regularly visit Cornish coastal waters to feed in summer.

7 BEADLET ANEMONE

Often seen as dark red jellylike blobs at low tide, beadlet anemones reveal short, stinging tentacles when submerged. They attach firmly to rock surfaces and use their tentacles to catch small fish and crustaceans. A ring of bright blue defensive beads helps them protect their territory from rival anemones.

8 SPINY STARFISH

The spiny starfish is a large, pale greenish starfish with rows of white spines and sometimes purple arm tips. A powerful predator, it feeds on shellfish and other starfish. It can reach impressive sizes (up to 70cm!) and will shed arms when stressed - later regrowing them, often leaving individuals with mismatched limbs.

HELP NATURE THIS SUMMER

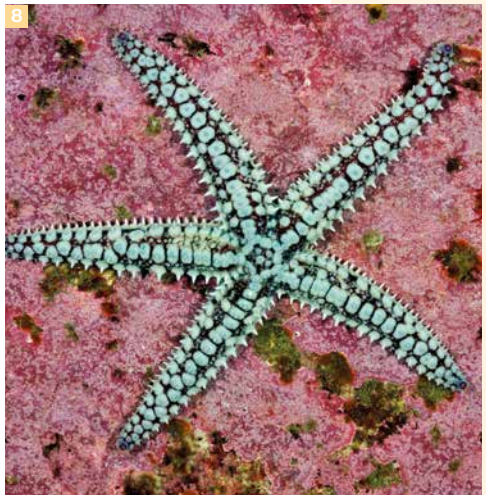
Summer brings more people to Cornwall's coast and countryside, making it an important season to support the wildlife that shares these spaces. Warm weather, busy beaches, and drier habitats can all put pressure on nature, but small, mindful actions can make a real difference during the height of the season.

Joining a beach clean is an easy way to protect marine life from harmful litter, while using BBQs responsibly helps prevent dune and grassland fires and avoids dangerous hot sand burns. When heading out on the water, choose ecofriendly wildlife tours that follow responsible viewing guidelines and put animal welfare first.

Our Your Shore Network offers plenty of ways to get involved, from surveys and beach cleans to fun public events. These community groups help protect our coast and support vital marine conservation - why not join them this summer?







TAKE ACTION FOR WILDLIFE

Take action for the marine environment and join your local Your Shore Network.

cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk/what-we-do/our-conservation-work/at-sea/your-shore-network

COMMON DOLPHIN: **MIKE SNELLE** | BEADLET ANEMONE: **MARK THOMAS** | SPINY STARFISH: **LINDA PITKIN**

WHAT TO SPOT IN AUTUMN

Autumn brings cooler days, rich colours, and a quieter rhythm to the natural world as leaves fall, fungi push through damp soil, and many animals busily prepare for the winter ahead.

In woodlands, owls call more frequently, bats forage before hibernation, and late flying insects make the most of lingering warmth. Although we often associate the coast and sand dunes with summer, there's still plenty to see, from hunting kestrels to hardy dune plants and late butterflies.

Autumn's softer light and calmer feel make it a wonderful time to notice the wildlife that thrives in these changing habitats.

WOODLAND

1 NOCTULE BAT

Our largest bat, the noctule roosts in tree cavities and hunts high above woodland canopies before dusk. It has distinct, direct flight and feeds on beetles and other large insects. Unlike most bats, its calls can sometimes be heard by people without a detector. Noctules hibernate through winter after autumn feeding.

2 TAWNY OWL

Autumn is the noisiest season for tawny owls as they compete over territories. You may hear the iconic "too-wit, too-woo" as males and females call to each other. It's Britain's largest common owl and hunts small mammals from a favourite perch. Stocky and reddish brown with large dark eyes, it nests in tree holes or old crow nests.

3 FLY AGARIC

The fly agaric is the classic red and white toadstool of storybooks, appearing beneath birch and other woodland trees in autumn. Its bright cap is the fruiting body, emerging from a hidden network of mycelium in the soil. Though iconic, this species is poisonous and should never be eaten.

4 MIGRANT HAWKER

A late flying dragonfly, the migrant hawker remains active well into autumn and often hunts along woodland edges. Males have blue spots along a dark body, while females are yellow-spotted. Agile and fast in flight, they catch insects on the wing and may gather in loose feeding groups in warm weather.









NOCTULE BAT: **TOM MARSHALL** | TAWNY OWL: **DAMIAN WATERS, DRUMIMAGES.CO.UK** | MIGRANT HAWKER: **DAVID LONGSHAW**

WHAT TO SPOT IN AUTUMN

SAND DUNES

5 COMMON CARDER BEE

With its fluffy brown and orange coat, the common carder bee is one of our most familiar bumblebees and remains active into late autumn. It gathers nectar from dune flowers, assisted by its long tongue (up to 8mm in length) and nest close to the ground in old mouse runs or mossy hollows. Colonies may hold up to 200 workers before dying back for winter.

6 KESTREL

Kestrels are often seen hovering over dunes, keeping their heads completely still even in strong winds to pinpoint mice, voles, and small birds among the grasses. Once they have located their prey, they can dive at impressive speeds. Males have grey heads and tails, while females are browner and heavily barred.



7 SMALL COPPER

Small but eye-catching, the small copper adds flashes of orange to sunny sand dunes into autumn. Males are territorial, often basking on bare sand or paths. Adults feed on flowers such as ragwort and thistles, while the caterpillars feed on sorrel plants growing in nearby open grassland.

8 SEA SPURGE

Sea spurge is a distinctive dune plant with upright stems, fleshy grey-green leaves and greenish yellow cupshaped bracts. Flowering through summer and autumn, it stores water to survive the dry, salty conditions of sandy coasts. Like other spurges, it contains a milky sap that is toxic and should be avoided.

HELP NATURE THIS AUTUMN

Autumn is a busy time for wildlife as many species prepare for winter, and a few simple actions can help protect the places they rely on.

One of the most important is picking up dog poo in both woodlands and dunes. Even small amounts can harm sensitive plants by adding excess nutrients, affecting soil health, and introducing parasites. It also helps protect people - especially children - from infections spread through contaminated waste.

After Halloween, dispose of pumpkins responsibly. Leaving them in the woods may seem kind, but they can make hedgehogs and other animals seriously ill. Instead, cook them, compost them or repurpose them at home.

As the weather cools, natural food becomes scarce and hibernators seek safe places to shelter. You can help by creating log piles, maintaining bird boxes, planting trees or spring bulbs, or simply leaving fallen fruit and leaves on the ground.







TAKE ACTION FOR WILDLIFE

Looking for ways to help wildlife in your own backyard? Make a real difference by making small changes. **cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk/actions/help-wildlife-cold**

COMMON CARDER BEE: **PENNY FRITH** | KESTREL: **RUSSELL SAVORY** | SMALL COPPER: **AMY LEWIS** | SEA SPURGE: **CHRIS LAWRENCE**

WHAT TO SPOT IN WINTER

Winter brings a starker beauty to Cornwall, as crisp skies, low sunlight, and rolling seas transform the landscape. While many animals lie low during the coldest months, others become easier to spot.

Along clifftops and coastlines, seals haul out to rest, some wintering owls hunt in daylight, and migrating whales occasionally pass close to shore. Estuaries also come alive, filling with flocks of waders and waterfowl escaping harsher weather further north. Even in the quietest part of the year, there is still plenty to discover for those willing to wrap up warm and spend time looking.

CLIFFTOPS & COASTLINES

1 GREY SEAL

Grey seals are often seen hauled out on beaches or bobbing just offshore, their long "roman nose" distinguishing them from common seals. They spend most of their time at sea hunting fish, returning to land to rest. Fluffy white pups are born in autumn and remain ashore until they moult. Seals are highly vulnerable to disturbance so make sure to follow the Cornwall Marine & Coastal Code.

2 HUMPBACK WHALE

Humpback whale sightings are increasing around Cornwall's coast in winter, when these long distance migrants pass by on their way to rich feeding grounds. Look for a tall, bushy blow or their huge pectoral fins slapping the surface. Each whale's tail pattern is unique so good quality photos can help researchers identify individuals.

3 SHORT-EARED OWL

Short-eared owls are one of the few owls active in daylight, often hunting low over coastal grassland and dunes in winter. Mottled brown with striking yellow eyes, they feed mainly on voles and small birds. Winter migrants boost numbers, so it's a good season to spot them from a distance.

4 CHOUGH

The chough - Cornwall's iconic red-billed, red-legged crow - feeds on insects in short coastal grassland and nests in caves or in old buildings. Glossy black and agile in flight, it gives a loud "cheeow" call. After years of absence, a small breeding population has now re-established itself in Cornwall.









GREY SEAL: **LARA HOWE** | HUMPBACK WHALE & CHOUGH: **ADRIAN LANGDON** | SHORT-EARED OWL: **DANNY GREEN/2020VISION**

WHAT TO SPOT IN WINTER

ESTUARIES

5 SPOONBILL

The elegant spoonbill is an increasingly regular winter sight on estuaries. Almost heron-sized, it feeds by sweeping its long, spoonshaped bill through shallow water to catch shrimps and insects. Bright white and distinctive in shape, spoonbills are a conservation success story returning to UK wetlands.

6 SHELDUCK

One of our largest ducks, the shelduck is striking with its greenish head, red bill, and white body marked by a chestnut breast band. It feeds on small invertebrates in estuary mud and sandy shores. Pairs often remain visible through winter before nesting in burrows or old holes in spring.

7 OYSTERCATCHER

The loud "peeping" call of the oystercatcher is a familiar winter sound on estuaries. Black and white with a long red bill, it specialises in eating shellfish, either hammering or prising them open. Many birds winter in the UK and are joined by migrants from Iceland and Scandinavia.

8 LAPWING

Lapwings gather in large, swirling winter flocks over estuaries and wetlands, their broad rounded wings flashing black and white. Up close, they show an iridescent green sheen and a distinctive crest. Their "peewit" call is unmistakable. Winter numbers peak in Cornwall as birds move west during cold spells.



HELP NATURE THIS WINTER

Winter can be a challenging time for wildlife, and small actions from all of us can help keep coastal species safe. One of the simplest steps is avoiding frisbees with holes or rings, which pose a serious entanglement risk to seals. Stick to solid disc designs to help prevent painful and sometimes fatal injuries.

If you spot a humpback whale from the coast, you can contribute to conservation by adding your sighting to our ORKS App. Each record helps build a clearer picture of their movements around Cornwall and supports long-term protection of these incredible animals.

It's vital to avoid disturbing wildlife in winter, when animals need to conserve energy.

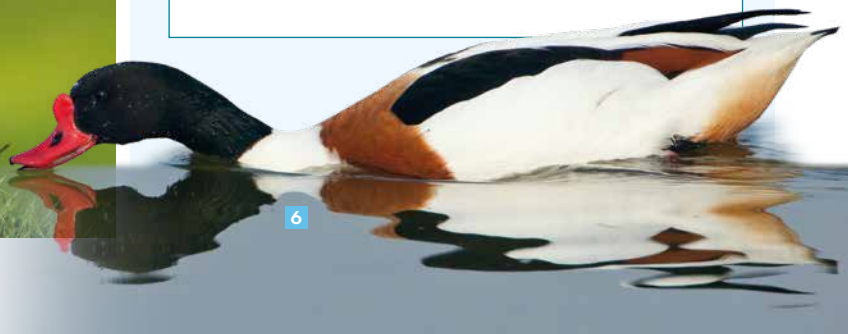
The Cornwall Marine & Coastal Code reminds us to watch from a distance, stay calm and quiet, and give wildlife space and time. Be alert, move slowly, and back away if animals change their behaviour. Respectful encounters help keep both people and wildlife safe.

TAKE ACTION FOR WILDLIFE

To read more on the best way to watch wildlife, for their protection as well as your enjoyment: **cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk/what-we-do/our-conservation-work/at-sea/marine-and-coastal-code**







SPOONBILL: **DAVID TIPLING/2020VISION** | SHELDUCK: **XGUY EDWARDES/2020VISION** | OYSTERCATCHER: **BOB COYLE** | LAPWING: **MARK HAMBLIN/2020VISION**

Thank you for your support

Please be aware, Cornwall Wildlife Trust is not a wildlife rescue charity.
If you ever find wildlife in distress, here are the best organisations to contact:

CORNWALL MARINE & COASTAL CODE GROUP

0345 201 26 26

To report incidents of marine wildlife disturbance (as soon as possible)

BRITISH DIVERS MARINE LIFE RESCUE

01825 765 546

If you find a sick or injured marine animal

MARINE STRANDINGS NETWORK

0345 201 26 26

If you find a dead marine animal, including seabirds (please do not touch)

THE CORNISH BIRD OF PREY CENTRE

01637 880 544

If you find an injured bird of prey

REPORT A WILDLIFE SIGHTING

If you've seen something interesting and want to tell us about it, please visit our 'Wildlife Recording' webpage to find out how you can submit your sighting to us.

erccis.org.uk/share-sightings

ORKS

OR DOWNLOAD THE ORKS APP

Download on the App Store | GET IT ON Google play

SHOW US YOUR WILD SNAPS!

Got some incredible photos or videos of Cornwall's wildlife and wild places?
Send us your best images to feature on our website and in our *Wild Cornwall* magazine.

cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk/upload



EARLY PURPLE ORCHID: **GUY EDWARDES/2020VISION** | CREATIVE: **LOUJONESDESIGN.COM**