**Wildlife locations – near and far**

Dreaming of a holiday next year or perhaps just a nice day out? The following are a selection of wildlife venues recommended by our members at the members evening on Tuesday 8th December.

**Our favourite wildlife sites, in Bucks/MK - Mary and Phil Sarre**

This is not a single site, but a string of particularly good sites, parts of the Chilterns Ridgeway path, combining a good walk, a good view, and some natural history interest, primarily botanical.

1. **Chinnor Hill.** Beech woods and chalk downland (BBOWT)

This is a BBOWT reserve on the chalk escarpment, with fine beechwoods, and chalk grassland flowers, including orchids, and the rare Chiltern Gentian.

Walk from either Bledlow village or from Car Park at SP767002.

[www.bbowt.org.uk/reserves/chinnor-hill](http://www.bbowt.org.uk/reserves/chinnor-hill)

1. **Lower Cadsden to Grangelands and Pulpit Hill**.

This walk from Lower Cadsden village east along the ridgeway is botanically very rich. Grangelands is another BBOWT site.

[www.bbowt.org.uk/reserves/grangelands](http://www.bbowt.org.uk/reserves/grangelands)

Park at Lower Cadsden, SP828050. Spring and Summer is good for a huge range of chalk grassland flora, including Pyramidal, Chalk Fragrant, and Bee orchids, as well as Common Rock Rose, Thyme, Marjoram, Horseshoe Vetch, all supporting a range of insect life.

1. **Ellesborough and Kimble Warrens.** Boxwood forest, accessed south west from Ellesborough village SP837066, or on a circular walk around Chequers, along Ridgeway, and then north to the village.

SSSI. Citation:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ellesborough_and_Kimble_Warrens>

And further afield, Aston Rowant (NNR) and Hartslock (BBOWT) are both excellent chalk downland sites, for flora and butterflies.

Hartslock: [www.bbowt.org.uk/reserves/hartslock](http://www.bbowt.org.uk/reserves/hartslock)

Is known for the range of orchids including Monkey, Lady, and White Helleborine. Also Pasqueflower, Chalk Milkwort.

Park in Goring village.

**Lochgarten and the surrounding area – Linda Murphy**

Lochgarten is an RSPB Reserve near Fort William, most famous for being the first site Ospreys returned to  breed in the UK after an absence of many years. The website gives directions, and far more information about the reserve and its highlights. <https://www.rspb.org.uk/reserves-and-events/reserves-a-z/loch-garten/>
Highlights of the area for me are the special birds not found in my area (apart from the Ospreys which pass through now and then) such as Capercaillie, Crested Tit, Black Throated and Red-Throated Divers, Black and Red Grouse, Ptarmigan, Slavonian Grebe to name but a few. The fantastic old Scots Pines (granny pines) are amazing and Red Squirrels are also an attraction (see the feedercam link from the website).

**Linford Wood- Joe Clinch**

**Why I have chosen it:**

Glorious spot especially in Spring/Early Summer

Biodiverse habitat of former Ancient Woodland including 6 ponds

Managed for wildlife by the Parks Trust

Local easy access

For more information go the excellent Society description on the website just click on Wildlife Sites or direct to <https://mknhs.org./linford-wood/>

**Personal highlights:**

Succession of spring/summer flowering plants

Orchids (Early Purple, Common Spotted, Greater Butterfly and Broad Leaved Helleborine)

Herb Paris

Mature Pedunculate Oaks

Midland Hawthorn (best to have Roy with you to confirm the identification!)

Woodland bird variety and song (Lesser Spotted Woodpecker seen by Martin Kincaid recently his first in 40 years. Great news)

The insect life especially butterflies

**Strongly recommend!**

**Ashland Lakes – Peter Barnes**

**How to get there:** Ashland is south of H9 Groveway, in between V8 Marlborough Street and V7 Saxon Street. The easiest access to the lakes is from Marlborough Street: at the traffic lights, enter Newington Gate and after 50 metres take the first left into Penshurst Crescent. The free car park is immediately to the left. There are two electric car charging points in the car park.

For satnav users, the post code is MK64AJ

The number 5 bus service stops on V8 Marlborough Street, close to the entrance to Newington Gate.

**Ashland Lakes** is managed by the **Parks Trust** [www.theparkstrust.com/parks/ashland-lakes](http://www.theparkstrust.com/parks/ashland-lakes)

There are four lakes; the one at the western end of the ‘string’ is significantly smaller than the other three. There are surfaced paths around the perimeter of the lakes and three footbridges across the junctions between them. All are suitable for wheelchairs and mobility scooters. The site is easily walked around in 30 minutes, allowing for stops to view.

**Bird life** There are resident populations of mute swan, Canada goose, mallard, little grebe, moorhen and black-headed gull. Over winter, there is a significant presence (c. 30) of wigeon and other occasional water birds e.g. greylag goose, gadwall, shoveler. Other birds to look out for are grey heron, little egret, coot, cormorant and pied wagtail. A great white egret was seen in 2019 and kingfisher have been sighted around the smallest lake.

**Amenities** In Yearlstone Square, 2-3 minutes’ walk from the lakes, there is a Premier convenience store and an excellent Fish and Chip shop (Moores).

**Tattenhoe, Milton Keynes – Harry Appleyard**

**Aigas Field Centre – Julie Lane**

near Beauly on the Moray Firth

Owned by Sir John Lister Kaye who writes beautiful books about wildlife and the Scottish environment, and his wife Lucy who is a professional chef and talented gardener.

The centre runs courses/holidays on a variety of things to do with the natural environment such as:

* Straight wildlife holidays
* Wildlife and walking
* Art
* Scottish history
* Gardening
* Wildlife photography

You stay in wooden lodges and eat in the main house which is a castellated Victorian lodge with a large baronial hall where they serve absolutely wonderful food cooked by Lucy and her team.

I went on a wildlife week and we spent time traveling to a variety of habitats including an early morning trip to the Moray Firth to hunt for otters, Glen Affric to see Golden Eagles amongst many other things, a boat trip out onto the Moray Firth to watch the huge bottle-nosed dolphins that inhabit the Firth and a visit to Chanonry Point on the Black Isle to watch them from the land. We spent a day travelling to the west coast to see seals, red and great northern divers, white tailed eagles and leaping salmon etc.

We also spent time at Aigas itself which has its own little loch inhabited by a small family of beavers and regularly visited by ospreys. There are also hides on the estate from which you can see pine martins and badgers in the evening and deer in the mornings. They also have a captive breeding programme for the Scottish wildcat and you are taken to see these amazing animals in their pens. This year they have given birth to two kits. All in all it is a veritable wildlife feast set in the stunning Scottish landscape and I would very much recommend it.

Use the following link for more info [www.aigas.co.uk](http://www.aigas.co.uk)

The following is a link to an Aigas YouTube promotion video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JlBa6Wr9vZs&utm_source=NEW+GDPR+MAILING+LIST&utm_campaign=8ee185551d-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_03_12_02_30_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_2ae1606d99-8ee185551d-513825109>

**Near and Far - Sue Hetherington**

How to pick “my favourite place” to (in normal circumstances) visit between January to June? I prepared my presentation several times over, each time changing it completely. At one stage I decided I’d do a month-by-month presentation covering these

* January – starling murmurations (almost anywhere, even in the middle of MK!)
* February – snowdrops (yes, a bit late for them but there is always a great show at Swyncombe, Oxon)
* March – native daffodils (Farndale, North Yorks) or the Farne Isles (bird-life building up – arctic terns not back yet)
* April – bluebells (I chose BBOWT Finmere Wood), peregrine falcons in urban settings on eggs (MK Dons stadium for example), Snakes Head Fritillaries (North Meadows, Cricklade)
* May – May Morning!!! Life affirming and rebirth, I love it so much (Padstow or Oxford); orchids (green winged at Bernwood Meadows, various at Aston Clinton), Ragpits – have seen lovely Roman Snails at the latter also). Bird breeding at full tilt (Farne Isles, Bempton Cliffs near Bridlington, East Yorkshire)
* June - badgers

Then I realised “that’s far too much” especially as the instructions said it was OK to have “one or two” (only) photos! So, I cut it down to just two

* The Farne Isles and
* Bempton Cliffs

Both of these are super places to visit. Lovely Sir David Attenborough counts the Farnes as one of his favourite places so what better recommendation? It really is incredibly special. Two islands of the group are visitable. On these, the National Trust (the owners) have marked out walkways and visitors may wander freely on these paths, often within almost touching distance of the birds. Indeed, some, like eider ducks, nest on the path and have to be protected from being trodden on by marker canes!

Bempton Cliffs is RSPB and is important for breeding seabirds, including a large gannet colony. There are great viewing platforms that the RSPB have constructed at the cliff top and a very nice visitor centre. In the season, the RSPB partner with a boat trip operator running out of Bridlington to run “seabird specials” which gives another perspective from the sea. It is only from this angle that the incredible Jurassic geology can be appreciated.

I really ached to miss all of these things during Spring 2020. And then I realised that what I had really missed was the ability to travel and see all the wonderful things out there in the world. The pandemic black cloud had a few tattered remnants of silver lining in that it forced me to look at my own little patch with a magnifying glass and that was great but I long to spread my wings. I know the tunnel ahead is still long and dark but on the evening of our zoom meeting, it was the very day that the first person was vaccinated under the Pfizer mass vaccination programme. I fancy I can see a faint glimmer of hope somewhere down the end the tunnel! So, my talk became “what might just be possible for me to look forward to in 2021”. And this is two things:

* late May/early June – a cruise to Britain’s remote island. One of them is St Kilda and I’m especially excited about that, it really is something to look forward to.
* September – Romania’s Danube Delta and Carpathian Mountains. I’ve never been there and was booked to go with Naturetrek in September 2020. It had been booked September 2019 when the pandemic nightmare was not dreamed of. The situation as we all recall was so confused for many months but whatever happened, I was adamant I wasn’t going and would have been happy to lose my deposits. Naturetrek were great though and cancelled it themselves, offering full refunds or the opportunity to rebook at any date of our choosing. We have rebooked for September 2021 so fingers crossed. It sounds a fabulous trip, one that was led for many years in the past by MKNHS’s own member Andy Harding. It’s a country I’ve never been to but having heard Andy give a talk about the region in the past, I am keen to explore.

**Naturetrek Holidays**

For those wanting to dream of future holidays abroad Naturetrek is running some online Winter Roadshows

These are a series of live online presentations throughout January and into February, with each covering a different geographical area and offering an opportunity to present questions to their expert staff and leaders. These include trips to almost every cvorner of the world, including: South America, Wildlife Cruises, Eastern / Western Europe, Asia, Great Brtain, Africa etc.

<https://www.naturetrek.co.uk/news/naturetrek-online-winter-roadshow?utm_source=Master&utm_campaign=ee8851f1b5-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_12_03_07_44&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_ace6dbc985-ee8851f1b5-287215906>