

# Impressive and Dynamic Wildlife and Nature

Morecambe Bay has so much to offer that it is hard to know where to begin. But describing the nature is a good place to start, because it really is **impressive**. Locals have long appreciated the nature here, but it also has national and even international significance. The whole of the bay is a RAMSAR site, designated for its international importance for migratory birds. It's also the largest intertidal estuary in the UK and provides a haven and seafood bar for over 225,000 birds each winter.

The mosaic of coastal cliffs, shingle, sand dunes, grasslands, wetlands and woodlands support a huge diversity of wildlife. Many habitats are so special they are projected internationally or nationally. Some species are so rare that Morecambe Bay is one of only a few places, or the only place, you can see them, including Lancastrian whitebeam, Walney geranium, Teesdale violet, Lady's slipper orchid, pearl bordered fritillaries, high brown fritillary and belted beauty moth. Other important wildlife includes the walking natterjack toad, booming bittern, basking seals, rutting red deer and charismatic otter.

## **Help your visitors to enjoy the special nature of Morecambe Bay:**

- Show how impressive our nature is.
- Share information about habitats and species.
- Recommend a local nature guide.
- Encourage everyone to get closer to nature.
- Highlight seasonal specialities.
- Keep a nature logbook next to your guestbook so that visitors know what to look for.
- Add the Morecambe Bay Nature website to yours for up to date information on nature events and seasonal spectacles [www.morecambebaynature.org.uk/discover](http://www.morecambebaynature.org.uk/discover)
- Encourage nature into your own garden and show your guests.
- Provide maps and nature books.
- Promote guided walks and events by local organisations including the Wildlife Trusts, RSPB, the National Trust and Morecambe Bay Partnership.
- Develop a blog or connect to local bloggers such as Beth Pipe, aka Cumbrian Rambler <http://cumbrianrambler.blogspot.co.uk/p/morecambe-bay.html>
- Join the Morecambe Bay Nature Tourism Business Network.

## Describing our Impressive Wildlife

It can be hard to describe why nature is so special with words alone – and we all know that a picture paints a thousand words. Use the gallery of photos on [www.morecambebaynature.org.uk](http://www.morecambebaynature.org.uk) or snap your own to inspire your visitors. Why not ask your visitors to share their nature photos with you on twitter and facebook?

Nature appeals to all the senses, and the sounds can be as impressive as the sights. Listen to recordings on the RSPB website to give visitors a feel for the area's evocative sounds.

*When we asked people what the nature is like here they talked about the “impressive” national and international importance of Morecambe Bay for both habitats and species. They described it as:*

dramatic	rare
stunning	immense
fabulous	unexpected
breath-taking	surprising
world-importance	intriguing
inspiring	breathtaking
moving	raises hairs on arm
best	gives me
special	goosebumps
unrivalled	

## FASCINATING FACTS

Use these top 3 fascinating facts to show just how impressive Morecambe Bay nature really is

1. The Morecambe Bay area has around 30 nature reserves where the wildlife is so special that they are regionally, nationally or internationally protected, and many more nature rich places. Most of them are free to visit and explore.
2. Morecambe Bay is the largest intertidal estuary in Britain and is the most important estuary for seabirds and waterfowl.
3. The Morecambe Bay area is one of the most bio-diverse areas in the country and Arnside and Silverdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is so super rich in nature that over 2/3 of Britain's flowering plant species can be found there.

## Morecambe Bay's Big Five

We might not have lions, zebras, or giraffes but Morecambe Bay is a great place for a nature safari.. Look out for our Big Five, while you explore the Bay:



Grey Seal © Ben Andrew



Otter © Ben Andrew



Red Deer © Ben Andrew



Pearl-bordered Fritillary © D Morris



Oystercatcher © Andy Hay rspb-images

## Nature Rich Places

The special nature of Morecambe Bay comes down to the many habitats you can find in such a small area, providing homes and food for so many different species. The wildlife is so special that many areas are nationally or internationally protected, with many others having county wide protection.

Here are some of the different habitats and species that live here, and some really good places to explore – all have public access and some have information on site. Check out the map showing many of these sites on [www.morecambebaynature.org.uk/map](http://www.morecambebaynature.org.uk/map)

### Shores and sands

- Sand dunes at Sandscale Haws National Nature Reserve and North Walney National Nature Reserve, both near Barrow, are home to the rare natterjack toad and rare plant species such as sea holly and sea lavender.
- Shingle beaches at South Walney nature reserve with great views to Piel and Foulney Islands. This is the only place in Cumbria and Lancashire to see grey seals haul out onto the beach.
- Humphrey Head nature reserve is a lovely limestone headland near Flookburgh and one of the places to find endemic lancastrian whitebeam. This is only found around Morecambe Bay and nowhere else in the world.
- Beaches at Roa Island and Sandscale Haws National Nature Reserve, North Walney National Nature Reserve, South Walney nature reserve, Half Moon Bay (Heysham) or Rossall Point are great places for tide pooling and beachcombing.



### Estuaries and rivers

- Favourite places to watch birds are along the Duddon, Leven, Kent, Keer, Lune and Wyre Estuaries, around Humphrey Head, Grange, Arnside and Morecambe Promenades, Hest Bank, Heysham Head, Glasson Docks, Cockersands Abbey, Pilling Lane Ends, Wyre Estuary Country Park and Rossall Point.
- Watch birds feed in the rich mud as the tide turns or see their numbers swell as they gather in roosts at high tide. The best time to see them is 2 hours before or after high tide as they are pushed closer to land. The site of over 10,000 knot flying together over Middleton Sands is a sight to remember.
- Estuary sites are perfect for first time bird watchers with wide open spaces and scenic walks to enjoy and you're usually not too far from a café with a view.
- Lapwing, curlew and oystercatcher are often seen in farm fields nearby the rivers and estuaries. Many farmers take pride in giving nature a home in places such as Rusland Valley, Lyth Valley, Arnside & Silverdale AONB, Lancaster, Sunderland Point and Cockerham.
- The large wetlands in Arnside & Silverdale AONB, and especially Leighton Moss nature reserve provide a haven for all sorts of wildfowl, waders, otters and eels, including the elusive bittern.

### FASCINATING FACTS

The sand, mudflats and saltmarsh in the Bay are internationally and nationally protected and cover an area the size of Manchester. They include: Winmarleigh Moss, Warton Crag, Leighton Moss, Arnside Knott, Whitbarrow, Meathop Moss, Humphrey Head, Walney Island and Sandscale Haws.



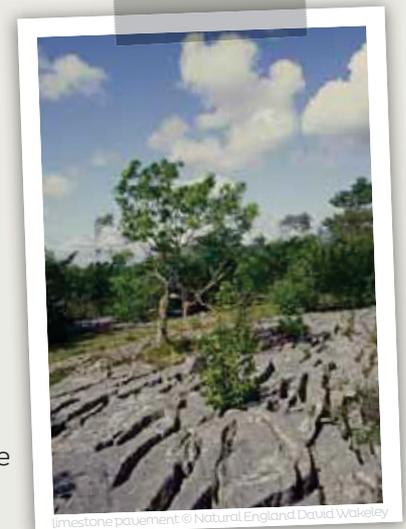
## Woodlands

- Woodlands like Roudsea Woods National Nature Reserve, near Ulverston provide food and shelter for birds and mammals, including the rare red squirrels and dormice.
- The Lancastrian whitebeam is only found in a few places, such as Humphrey Head nature reserve and Grubbins Wood, near Arnside.
- Arnside & Silverdale AONB still has numerous traditional orchards and a celebratory Apple Day is held in early October every other year.
- Merlewood and Egglerslack woods, at Grange over Sands, and woodlands around Whitbarrow National Nature Reserve are fantastic for springtime blue bells and wild garlic, with Brigsteer Woods and the woodlands of Arnside & Silverdale AONB having all these and thousands of wild daffodils too. Coppicing is also common in these woods.
- The woods around Hampsfield are a juniper temperate rainforest. The emerald green juniper bushes are hidden in the scrub.



## Limestone grasslands

- Wildlife thrives on limestone rocks. Around the northern edge of Morecambe Bay you can find limestone grasslands, pavements and cliffs. In Spring, these species-rich grasslands are covered in colourful and sweet-smelling herbs and wildflowers such as thyme, rock rose and orchids.
- Great places for limestone grassland include Brown Robin nature reserve, Helsington Barrow, around Sizergh Estate, Arnside Knott, Warton Crag nature reserve and elsewhere in Arnside & Silverdale AONB, Whitbarrow National Nature Reserve and Scout Scar. Throughout spring and summer you'll find a multitude of butterflies here, and maybe some birds of prey overhead.
- At limestone coastal areas like Jack Scout, Humphrey Head nature reserve, and St Patricks Chapel you'll find caves and cliffs and great views across the bay and out to sea as well as flower and orchid rich grasslands.
- Famous limestone pavement sites can be found at Urswick, Whitbarrow nature reserve and Hampsfell, with the best example at Gait Barrows National Nature Reserve. These fascinating 'moonscapes' are great to explore in winter and make a great backdrop for photographs.



## Bogs and mosses

- Bogs and mosses are fascinating places, packed with weird and wonderful plants and a good place to spot deer.
- Explore 3 National Nature Reserves - Duddon Mosses, Roudsea Woods and Mosses and Rusland Valley Mosses, and 5 other nature reserves including Meathop Moss, Foulshaw Moss, Nichols Moss, Winmarleigh Moss and Heysham Moss.
- Bog asphodel turns a brilliant orange colour in September.
- In spring and summer these provide a haven for butterflies and dragonflies and the rare bog bush cricket.



## Spectacular Species

The rich mosaic of habitats support a huge diversity of wildlife, and Morecambe Bay is a haven for birds and butterflies in particular. Great facts to share with your visitors include:

- Morecambe Bay is home to a range of nationally significant endemic and rare species.
- Morecambe Bay has one of the biggest over-wintering and passage populations of wading birds and wildfowl in Britain. It forms a crucial part of a network of estuaries providing a haven for migrating birds. They can feed and roost before continuing on with their long journeys.
- The Morecambe Bay area is the only place in the world where the Lancastrian whitebeam occurs.
- South Walney nature reserve hosts the principal grey seal haul-out site for Lancashire and Cumbria.
- Natterjack toad ponds can be found at sites around Barrow and Walney Island.
- Leighton Moss nature reserve is home to bearded tits, marsh harriers and rare avocets.
- Arnside & Silverdale AONB and the limestone hills around the Bay are the most important places for butterflies in the north of England. They are the national stronghold for high brown fritillary and the duke of burgundy – two of Britain's most threatened butterflies.

For a detailed list of wildlife and the best places and times to share with your visitors connect to [www.morecambebaynature.org.uk/seasonal-highlights](http://www.morecambebaynature.org.uk/seasonal-highlights)



# Nature for Everyone

Some nature in Morecambe Bay is accessible and predictable, while some is hidden away and rare. Know your audience, from novice to experienced nature watchers, and describe appropriate nature experiences.

## New Nature Watchers

Tell new nature watchers about the nature that is close up and on your doorstep. There are plenty of impressive sites and species that are easy to find and will capture their imagination. Pack in a week of wildlife watching with our pick of the best 10 sites for beginners:

1. Listen out for the call of natterjack toads with National Trust rangers at Sandscale Haws National Nature Reserve.
2. Watch the seals playing in the surf around Lighthouse Bay and on the beaches at the end of South Walney nature reserve.
3. Walk amongst the butterflies and flowers that are abundant in Summer at Whitbarrow National Nature Reserve.
4. Follow easy walks around Sizergh Castle estate and spot hawfinches in spring from the visitor centre outdoor deck.
5. Seek out rare orchids along the nature trail at Gait Barrows National Nature Reserve.
6. See a live showcase of the thousands of oystercatcher, knot and curlew that visit Morecambe Bay at Arnside, Morecambe, and Grange Promenades a couple of hours before or after high tide.
7. Follow lapwing, golden plover, knot and redshank on a walk or cycle ride along the Lune Estuary to Glasson Dock.
8. Look for the flash of colour as the red deer rut among the reed beds in autumn at Leighton Moss nature reserve and in nearby fields. The males will go head to head for the right to mate with the females, bellowing across the reserve at one another and locking antlers in battle.
9. In autumn, watch flocks of up to 100,000 starlings as they sweep in before sunset to roost on the Leighton Moss nature reserve.
10. Learn about the coast and look out for redshank, dunlin and turnstone on the beach from Rossall Point Observatory.



South Walney nature reserve © Susannah Bleakley



Leighton Moss nature reserve © Ben Hall

## Keen Wildlife Lovers

If your visitors are keen nature lovers, you'll find some rare and unusual species. These are our top 10 sites for truly unique viewing:

1. Stick to the paths and pull out your binoculars to see the arctic and little tern nesting at Foulney Island nature reserve.
2. Head to Brown Robin nature reserve to seek out waxcap fungi.
3. Spot the difference between the limestone and sandstone forests at Whitbarrow National Nature Reserve.
4. Tick the endemic Walney geranium off your list at North Walney National Nature Reserve.
5. Brush up on your orchid ID at Hodbarrow nature reserve, Gait Barrows National Nature Reserve, Arnside Knott and Latterbarrow nature reserve.
6. Look out for marsh harriers hunting prey above the reeds at Leighton Moss nature reserve.
7. Head to Foulshaw Moss nature reserve, the only place in Morecambe Bay to spot white faced darter dragonfly and nesting osprey.
8. See if you can find the rare duke of burgundy on scrubby grassland and sunny woodland clearings at High Dam.
9. Warton Crag nature reserve is the best place to find the rare and threatened high brown fritillary, spot the caterpillars on the violets that grow amongst the bracken.
10. Walk along the causeway at Leighton Moss nature reserve in autumn to watch the bearded tit filling up on grit from the specially placed grit trays.

For more detailed information on these places, visit the websites of the charities and bodies that care for them:

- Arnside & Silverdale AONB
- Cumbria Wildlife Trust
- Forestry Commission
- National Trust
- Natural England
- Lancashire Wildlife Trust
- RSPB
- Wyre Borough Council



© Ben Hall

### CASE STUDY

## RSPB Leighton Moss

We expect the RSPB to be good at promoting nature, but they go above and beyond to make wildlife watching accessible to everyone at RSPB Leighton Moss nature reserve. Visitors are invited to post their recent sightings in the visitor centre, so that others know what to look out for. Click on their webpage and the first thing you will see is "Top things to do in winter" (or whichever season we are in.). By highlighting how wildlife changes from day to day and season to season, they show new wildlife watchers what to look for, and entice experienced nature lovers to come back again."

Annabel Rushton, marketing manager for the reserve says, "There is something new and exciting to see every season. Visitors don't necessarily know this, so it is our job to make sure people have the best possible experience when they are here, and let them know about the amazing opportunities there are to get close to nature at any time of year, to encourage them to come back. From booming bitterns in spring, regal red deer in summer, swirling starlings in autumn and dazzling ducks in winter, there is a lot to be discovered."

## Seasonal Specialities

*The nature in Morecambe Bay is so dynamic, and changes from season to season, or even from day to day. You could describe the nature as:*

changing

diversity

varied

tidal

moving

precious

different

seasonal

always something new

Give your visitors even more reasons to stay longer and come back again by highlighting our dynamic wildlife offer. Here are some specialities for each season:

### SPRING

- green hairstreak butterfly and emperor moth
- orchids and thousands of spring flowers like wild garlic and daffodils
- avocets, hawfinch, marsh tit and peregrine
- natterjack toads
- the first migrants of the year - arctic, little and sandwich terns and pink footed geese (they appear in autumn too)

### SUMMER

- young red deer
- lots of butterflies like pearl bordered fritillary, small pearl bordered fritillary, high brown fritillary, and northern brown argus
- rare plants such as dark red helleborine and sundew
- dragonflies and damselflies like brown hawker dragonfly, black darter dragonfly and large red damselfly
- the metallic green tiger beetle

### AUTUMN

- starling murmurations – an amazing nature spectacle
- thousands of pink footed geese grazing on saltmarsh (dawn and dusk are the best times to see them)
- knot (around high spring tides is best)
- bearded tits at Leighton Moss nature reserve (on a fine morning is best)
- waxcap fungi on woodland floors

### WINTER

- grey seals (you can see these all year round but winter high tide is best)
- as their name suggests, november and december moths
- keep your eyes peeled and you may spot a bittern walking across frozen reedbeds

For the most up to date nature activities and seasonal spectacles visit Morecambe Bay Nature website