

FIELD CRAFT

Making the most of birding staycations

We are very lucky to have a wealth of wildlife to experience so close to home. But working out how to make the most of birding in a new, unfamiliar landscape can be daunting. Whether you have a trip booked or are deciding where to go, Training Officer Kate Fox shares some useful tips to help you make the most of your birding staycation.

What's about: where to look?

A good first step when deciding where to go is to do some groundwork about what to expect in different places!

TARGET SPECIES

If you have a particular target species in mind which has a restricted range, finding out exactly where they can be found can certainly narrow down your options. For example, a quest for Cirl Buntings would take you to pockets of the south coast of Devon and Cornwall, and Crested Tits would draw you to the ancient Caledonian pine forests of northern Scotland. Information on species' distributions can be found in most bird guides, and on our recently revamped BirdFacts webpages (www.bto.org/birdfacts).

Considering the time of year is also important (*BTO News* 336). What species or wildlife spectacles should you expect

there at that time? For most migratory species, and many resident ones, the likelihood of an encounter can change considerably in just a few weeks. For example, seabird-filled cliffs are a feature of spring and early summer, whereas Starling murmurations are a winter wonder.

GAINING INTEL

Now you've identified your target species, it's time to find out the best and most accessible way to see it. There are many ways to gain intel. Firstly, local knowledge is very helpful. If you are birding in Wales or Scotland, check out the Welsh Ornithological Society (WOS) and Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) online for pointers. On a more local scale, many regions have bird clubs which may post updates on recent sightings online and produce annual bird reports summarising their records (page 37). Don't underestimate the value of word of mouth either – chatting to fellow birdwatchers is a great way to get pointers (*BTO News* 330). Social media is another way to make connections and gain local intel. Following nature reserves, bird clubs and local birders, and even certain hashtags (#) on social media can be insightful.

Mobile apps are also brilliant resources. For example, the SOC's 'Where to Watch Birds in Scotland' is a comprehensive guide to the top birdwatching spots in the country. The 'Sightings' page on our very own BirdTrack app also

shows information on recent sightings submitted. If rarities interest you, then there are also designated apps for updates on these species, although some require paid subscriptions. However, please be mindful that some species are sensitive, and information about their location is confidential to protect them from disturbance. Further guidance can be found on the Rare Breeding Birds Panel's website (<https://rbbp.org.uk>).

For people with accessibility needs, there are organisations such as 'Birding for All' which provide guides to accessible nature reserves across the UK on their website (<https://birdingforall.com>). Some reserves also have off-road mobility scooters available for hire, allowing you to venture further on your birding adventures.

BIRD OBSERVATORIES

The UK has a network of bird observatories, dedicated to monitoring bird migration. Naturally, these are located in prime birding hotspots. As well as hosting some exciting breeding and vagrant birds, they are also a great source of information about birds, through their libraries and local birdwatching communities. Many also provide reasonably priced accommodation, allowing you to immerse yourself in observatory life (*BTO News* 342). Grants are available to help people access bird observatories, such as the BTO's Young Bird Observatory Volunteers programme (www.bto.org/ybov).



What's about: being prepared!

Once you've chosen a destination, it's time to focus on the birds! If you're visiting a new area, the chances are you'll see some unfamiliar species. Learning which species to expect in that area, and how to identify them, will give you a head start when it comes to finding the birds in the field. For example, what sounds do they make, and where within the habitat are you likely to see them? We have lots of useful information on our website that can help you prepare, such as our online courses and freely available videos on confusion species and identifying birds by sound. And of course, keeping a bird guide close to hand during your adventures is a great move!

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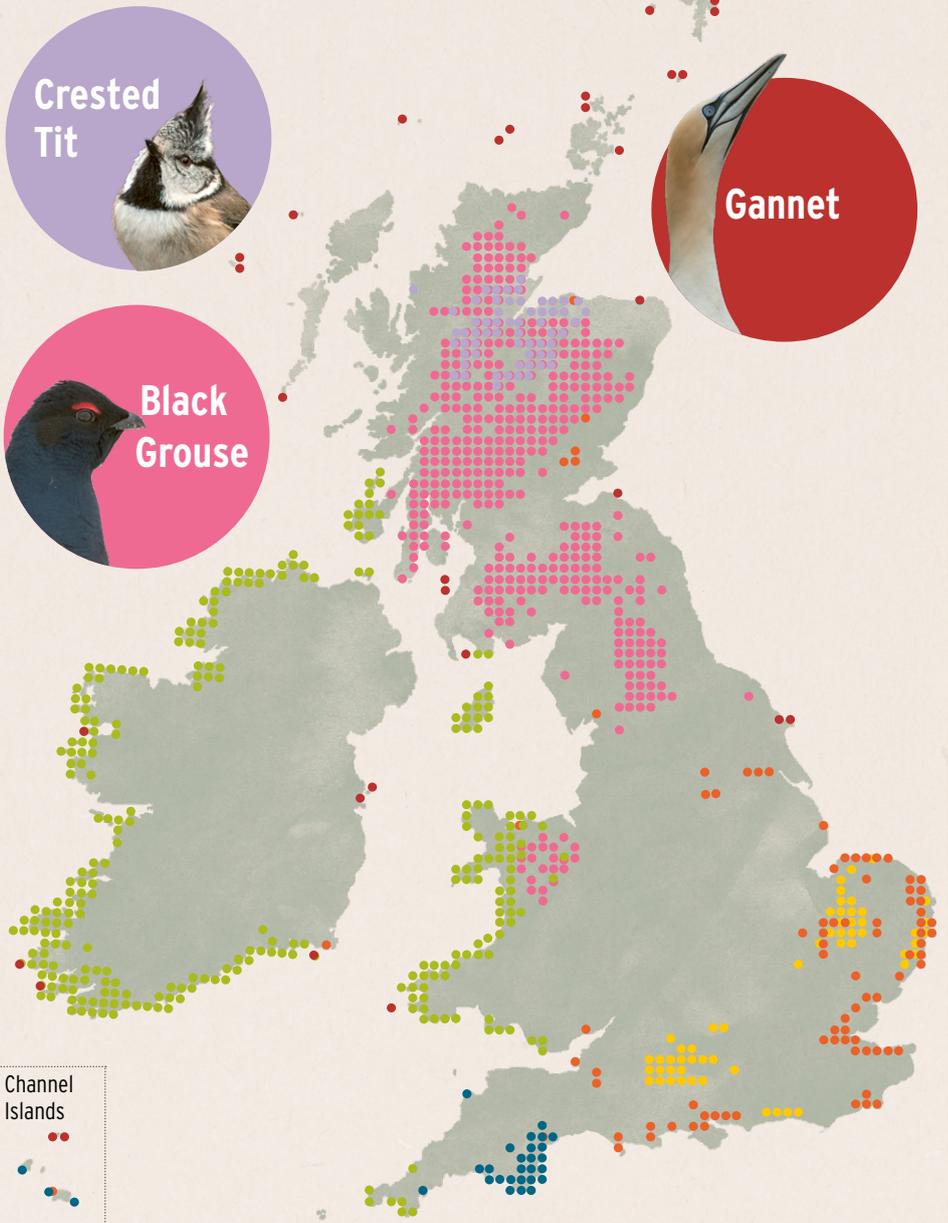
Make it count!

Did you know, you can record data on BirdTrack across the UK? This means you can contribute to our understanding of bird populations even on your holidays. BirdTrack lists are also a great way to keep track of what birds you have seen on your trip.

Bear in mind that BTO and other organisations might also be running one-off or periodic surveys that you could take part in on your travels. For example, if you are visiting upland areas during the breeding season, you may be able to contribute to Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data through the Upland Rovers scheme. This involves a one-off visit to a selection of remote, less visited BBS squares, helping increase coverage and contribute important information as well as being a great reason to explore new areas! ■

STAYCATION BIRDING MAP

The breeding ranges of many species are restricted, so knowing those can give a good idea of what you might expect to find in unfamiliar areas.



Find out more For information on improving your bird ID skills, visit: www.bto.org/develop-your-skills

Take part in BirdTrack: www.birdtrack.net

Sign up for Upland Rovers: www.bto.org/upland-rovers

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