

The Malvern Group of the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust commenced its 2023 programme of events on Thursday evening, 5th January, with an interesting and very informative illustrated talk given by Tom Mabbett, entitled “The Best of Britain: From Ardnamurchan to the Forest of Dean”. Tom is a very keen birder and naturalist, joining the wildlife holiday company, Naturetrek, in 2013 and is one of their experienced operations managers and tour leaders. Whilst leading tours to many parts of the world, he chose for his talk to our group to share some of the wildlife found and photographed in his favourite areas around the UK.

The Ardnamurchan peninsula is one of the most remote areas on the Scottish mainland. With a focus on birds and mammals, *eagles* and other raptors are plentiful, whilst *otters*, *pine marten* and *red deer* are always endearing. *Scotch argus* and *chequered skipper* butterflies are always a pleasure to see. Sea watching may provide good views of *dolphins*, *minke whales* or even *basking sharks* if you are lucky. A visit to the Treshnish Isles during May or June brings you up close to many species of breeding sea birds, including the enchanting *puffins*.

The Forest of Dean covers an area of about 100 square kilometres and is England’s second largest expanse of ancient woodland, after the New Forest. *Wild boar* numbers in this area have now increased to over 1,000 and are best sought around dawn or dusk. Many species of birds can be seen with seasonal preferences. During winter/early spring, *crossbills*, *brambling*, *hawfinches* and the occasional *great grey shrike* may be spotted. Later, into early summer, *wood warbler*, *pied and spotted flycatcher*, *firecrest* and *nightjar* are the targets. *Wood white* and *pearl-bordered fritillary* butterflies may also be seen at this time, but always watch out for *adders*.

The Somerset Levels encompass the catchment areas of the rivers Axe, Brue and Parrett. Historically, the area was formed of a series of peat beds, which today contain a rich biodiversity supporting a vast variety of plant species and feeding grounds for wildlife. Winter sees massive flocks of *wildfowl*, including *wigeon*, *teal* and *shoveler*, as well as the breath-taking *starling* murmurations over their reedbed roosting sites. In more recent times, *common cranes* have been successfully re-introduced after an absence of 400 years.

The East Yorkshire coast provides one of the country’s most thrilling migration hotspots at Spurn Point. During early autumn, thousands of birds can be seen passing the Bird Observatory on the spit between the Humber estuary and the North Sea. Further to the north are the sea bird nesting colonies at Bempton Cliffs, where *guillemot*, *razorbill*, *puffin*, *kittiwake* and *gannet* can be seen in early summer.

With so many places in Britain to see wildlife, Tom explained his fascination for ‘Patch Birding’ in which all species are special and occur within a small local area close to home throughout the year – Dowdeswell Reservoir being his particular place of interest and where

the odd rarity becomes the 'stuff of legends'! Tom also explained that his interest has been extended to include 'Camera Trapping' whereby he has set up a camera to catch and monitor any activities that occur over a longer period of time. Such sequences have picked up *water rail*, *water shrew*, *stoat*, *roe deer* and a very inquisitive *grey heron* actually monitoring the camera!

From the Group's enthusiastic appreciation of the presentation, all the areas depicted will be receiving a few more visitations during the forthcoming year thanks to Tom.