

Natural heritage

Thanks to a keen interest of many islanders in their natural heritage, the wildlife on Alderney is in safe hands, from the famous blonde hedgehogs unique to the island, to the multitude of gannets on the incredible gannetries at Ortac and Les Etacs. About 7000 pairs nest here, totalling approximately two per cent of the world population. Les Etacs is arguably the most easily viewed colony in Europe.

Alderney has 260 species of birds that has made the island their home including puffins, pulmars, guillemots, Dartford warblers and peregrines, and many interesting continental visitors can be seen as they stop off here on migration.

The island of Burhou, which lies one and a quarter miles northwest of Alderney was granted a Ramsar designation in 2005. Low-lying and uninhabited it is only half a mile long and one fifth of a mile wide and home to 11 species of breeding birds including the puffin.

A walk on the wild side

With over 50 miles of walks and paths taking you across commons, beaches, along the cliffs and around town, the ideal way to discover Alderney is on foot. There is very little traffic outside the main town, no traffic lights or road rage, which makes walking, even on the main roads, a pleasure.

Two ideal places to watch and enjoy Alderney's rich wildlife is the Mannez birdhide, erected by the Alderney Wildlife Trust and the Longis birdhide, which is in a fantastically positioned, peaceful environment.

A walk at night time could reveal a number of surprises! Not only are Alderney's skies ideal for star gazing but under the cover of darkness you may see bats who nest in several places on the island or, if you are lucky, you may also catch sight of Alderney's more elusive nocturnal residents, the black rabbits or the famous blonde hedgehogs.

The unique blonde hedgehog

One of Alderney's more unusual residents is the blonde hedgehog which is unique to the island. The origin of this nocturnal creature, that carries no fleas, remains a mystery, although some claim the first species arrived on the island in the 1960's in a Harrods shopping bag. Not albinos, these hedgehogs have a rare recessive gene giving rise to beady, button-black eyes and attractive creamy-coloured spines.

Beautiful wooded valleys

Alderney offers beautiful woodland and untouched nooks and crannies where wildlife hides and thrives. You will discover an assault on the senses, from the seasonal scents and colours along the coast to the footpaths with their flora and fauna. Yellow coconut-scented gorse covers huge areas of coastal heathland before meeting the brilliant yellows of prostrate broom clinging to the cliff face. Along the coastal tracks the pinks, whites and blues of thrift, sea campion and sheepsbit scabious, pattern the thin soils and exposed rock.

Spring probably brings the best show with secluded wooded valleys turning white with blackthorn and elderblossom. Visitors can also enjoy the dark blues of sea holly, the golden yellow-horned poppy and the honey-scented white flowers of the sea kale. Listen carefully and you can hear the croak of ravens, the shrill cry of a kestrel, the call of a fan-tailed warbler or the shriek of water rail.

The Alderney Wildlife Trust and volunteers have been busily planting a 46 acre area with trees, the aim being to create a mature woodland cover that can be enjoyed by both residents and visitors.

Round island boat trips

Boat trips from Alderney leave daily during the summer months taking visitors on a round island trip to see the puffins on Burhou, the Atlantic seal colony near Burhou Reef and the rest of the Ramsar site, including the gannet colonies on Les Etacs and Ortac. A trip to Les Etacs gannetry is impressive. Here, you will be surrounded by these graceful, acrobatic divers plunging into the water around you from the most incredible heights to catch fish.

Whilst discovering the island by sea, you may even spot dolphins and the odd basking shark in summer.

Rich variety of marine life

On Alderney you are surrounded by stunning beaches which host a rich variety of marine life. The rockpooling is some of the best to be found and a great way to keep children (and adults) amused for many hours. Clonque, Braye Bay, Corblets and Longis Bay are some of the best to scramble around with your fishing net and bucket.

The tidal range can be as much as 6.6 vertical metres during "springs", which is one of Alderney's distinctive natural features that helped recognition as a special site under the Ramsar Wetlands Convention.

At low tide, huge expanses of rock and seaweed are exposed to rifle through and find hidden gems like the black-faced blenny. There are cushion stars, urchins and lobsters to find if you look carefully. Have a hunt for Alderney's famous ormers, a rare delicacy, with supposed aphrodisiac qualities. Alderney, incidently, is the most northerly place that you can find them. They can be identified by the curved row of holes in a mother of pearl shell.

If you prefer to get really wet, then the snorkelling and diving are incredible. The water clarity is very good and there's a lot to see whether you're a beginner or hardy, seasoned professional.

For something a bit different, you can always go for a paddle in transparent canoes at Longis Bay and discover what lies on the sea bed.

