



40 places to see

Orchids

A guide to some of the UK's best orchid reserves

40 places to see...

Orchids

For a few short weeks they're our most beautiful wild flowers. Here's where to get out and enjoy them this spring and summer.

An exotic and mysterious aura surrounds the orchid, lending it the reputation for being rare and hard to find. In fact, there are over 50 species of wild orchid in the UK, not including their many hybrids, and in the right conditions, displays can number in their hundreds.

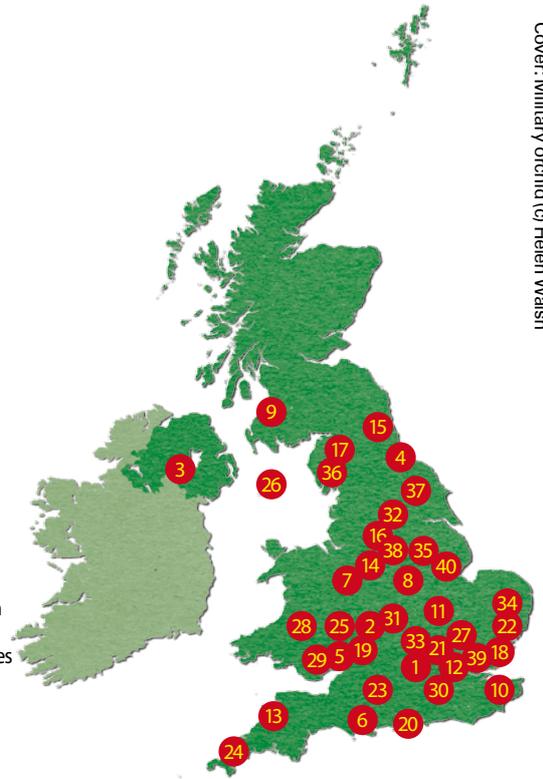
Orchids captured the imagination of our naturalist forebears and have been subject to some creative namings, many of which invite the enthusiast to share in the appreciation of their diverse forms.

The blooms of many resemble their namesake; man and frog orchids sport trailing legs, lady's tresses wear petticoats, and fly and bee orchid share the shape and colouration of insects. This mimicry is famously intentional

in the case of the bee orchid. It's alluring appearance and scent persuades amorous bees to copulate, thereby transferring pollen to other nearby plants with the aid of their unwitting admirers.

Flowering times differ by species, with many early varieties entering their peak season from May onwards. Helleborines generally flower later, extending the season into August for the avid orchid seeker.

Here we suggest just a handful of Wildlife Trust reserves to view wild orchids at this spring and summer. For more information about the reserves listed here, or to find alternatives near you, visit www.wildlifetrusts.org.uk/yourlocaltrust



Lady x monkey hybrid orchid (c) Chris Raper



Knapp reserve (c) Paul Lane

1 Hartslock reserve

Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust

A fabulous swathe of chalk grassland overlooking the Thames, Hartslock is renowned for its hundreds of monkey orchids as well as lady, common spotted, pyramidal, and white helleborine. Look out for the unique hybrid lady monkey orchid. The best time to visit is May or early June.

Where is it? 7 miles NW of Reading near Upper Gatehampton Farm. OS Sheet 175, SU 616 795

2 Knapp and Papermill reserve

Worcestershire Wildlife Trust

A corner of old England nestled in the Leigh Brook valley. Popular for its scenic beauty and the variety of habitats and wildlife for visitors to enjoy at any time of the year. The reserve boasts meadows, woodland and orchard habitat. Orchids include green-winged and a display of up to 10,000 common spotted orchids.

Where is it? 7 miles W of Worcester. Grid ref: SO 751 522



Marsh helleborine (c) Les Binns



Dark red helleborine (c) Philip Precey

3 Milford Cutting

Ulster Wildlife Trust

This small, secluded nature reserve, outside of Armagh City, is an old railway cutting with a mix of flowery calcareous grasslands and scrubby woodland. Its sloping grassy banks shelter common twayblade, fragrant and common spotted orchids, and marsh helleborine - an orchid so rare it is protected by law.

Where is it? 2 miles SW of Armagh. Postcode: BT60 3NY

4 Bishop Middleham

Durham Wildlife Trust

An old, large magnesian limestone quarry which is noted for its very rich flora, characteristic of a habitat that is internationally rare. The site supports pyramidal, common spotted, fragrant and bee orchid and lots of dark red helleborines. Lots of butterflies too. Best visited April to July for most orchids or July/August for helleborines.

Where is it? 2 miles N of Sedgfield. Grid ref: NZ 331 326

New Grove Meadows (c) Gwent WT



5 New Grove Meadows
Gwent Wildlife Trust

One of Britain's best old hay meadows, and a riot of colour in early summer. In May, early purple orchids appear and by the end of the month the fields are dominated by large numbers of green-winged orchids. Later in the season common spotted orchids appear along with twayblade and even the occasional broad leaved helleborine.

Where is it? 6 miles S of Monmouth. Grid ref: SO 501 067

Fragrant orchid (c) Philip Precey



6 Fontmell Down
Dorset Wildlife Trust

Primarily chalk grassland on the upper slopes of the north Dorset downs. Interspersed scrub and woodland provide shelter for many species of butterfly, while the open chalk grassland of the lower slopes is covered in wildflowers in the spring and summer months. Nine orchid species are found here including bee, frog, fragrant and lesser butterfly orchid.

Where is it? 4 miles S of Shaftesbury. Grid ref: ST 887 176

Pyramidal orchid (c) Les Binns



7 Llynclly Hill
Shropshire Wildlife Trust

Old quarries, screes, meadows, pond and woodland make up this diverse reserve. These habitats help to support a range of orchid species including early purple, common spotted, butterfly, fragrant, pyramidal and lesser and greater butterfly orchids.

Where is it? 3 miles S of Oswestry. Grid ref: SJ 272 236

Common spotted orchid (c) Tom Marshall



8 Cribb's Meadow
Leics & Rutland Wildlife Trust

The meadow sits on Boulder Clay, a substrate renowned for supporting herb-rich grassland. Designated a National Nature Reserve and SSSI, the site boasts green winged orchid in May and common spotted and twayblade in June.

Where is it? 5km east of Wymondham on Leics/Lincs border. Grid SK 899 188

Frog orchid (c) Bruce Shortland



9 Feoch Meadows
Scottish Wildlife Trust

Feoch Meadows is regarded as one of the finest grasslands in Ayrshire and is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. It is a working Ayrshire farm with nine species including small white and lesser butterfly, frog, fragrant and greater butterfly orchids.

Where is it? 30 miles NE of Stranraer and 1.5 miles E of Barrhill village. Grid ref: NX 263 822

Early purple orchid (c) Philip Precey



10 Yocketts Bank
Kent Wildlife Trust

23 hectares of SSSI ancient woodland on a chalk escarpment with clay cap. Several small areas of chalk grassland are kept open by mowing annually to further enhance the variety of wildlife. This is probably one of the best sites for lady orchid and there are excellent colonies of twayblade, common spotted, early-purple, fly and other orchids.

Where is it? 2 miles S of Petham. Grid ref: 179T 125 477

Chettisham Meadow (c) Lorna Parker



11 Chettisham Meadow
Beds, Cambs, Northants and Peterborough Wildlife Trust

An historic remnant of neutral grassland that has been managed as a traditional hay meadow for over a century. A spectacular show of green-winged orchids appears in late April and May with bee and common spotted orchids showing later in the summer.

Where is it? 2 miles N of Ely between Chettisham village and Little Downham. OS Sheet 143, TL 540 830

Man orchid (c) Les Binns



12 Hutchinson's Bank, Chapel Bank & Threecorner Grove
London Wildlife Trust

The steep grassland slope of Hutchinson's Bank hosts wonderfully diverse plantlife, including pyramidal, common spotted and man orchid. Following the chalk walk also brings you to Chapel Bank, an area spiked with orchids including common twayblade and white helleborine.

Where is it? Featherbed Lane or Farleigh Dean Crescent, New Addington, Croydon. Grid refs: TQ381616 & TQ386607

Heath spotted orchid (c) Philip Precey



13 Dunsdon reserve
Devon Wildlife Trust

One of Devon Wildlife Trust's 12 Culm grassland reserves and an important site for this marshy, heathy pasture habitat. Supports good displays of key orchid species such as the rare lesser butterfly orchid, heath spotted orchid and southern marsh orchid.

Where is it? NW of Holsworthy, a few miles north of Pancrasweek village. Grid ref: SS 302 080 and SS 307083.

Thorswood (c) Colin Hayes



14 Thorswood reserve
Staffordshire Wildlife Trust

150 acres of flower-rich pastures, upland heath and meadows - visit in summer to see early purple orchids. The reserve is also a treat for history lovers and you'll find iron age burial mounds and evidence of the area's rich industrial heritage within the landscape.

Where is it? 1 mile NW of Stanton near Thorswood House. Grid ref: SK 115 470

Lesser butterfly orchid (c) Philip Precey



15 East Chevington reserve
Northumberland Wildlife Trust

This reserve is still under development having been passed to NWT following opencast restoration in 2003. The two large lakes with fringing reedbeds, grassland and newly planted woodland make this reserve a prime birdwatching spot as well as a good place to see northern marsh and lesser butterfly orchids.

Where is it? To the E of Red Row. OS Sheet 81, NZ 270 990

Priestcliffe Lees (c) Matthew Roberts



16 The Wye Valley reserves
Derbyshire Wildlife Trust

Made up of a trio of sites - Chee Dale, Miller's Dale and Priestcliffe Lees - the Wye Valley reserves are a good place for a variety of different orchids, including common spotted, early purple, bee and fragrant orchid.

Where is it? In the Wye Valley to the SE of Buxton. All three reserves lie adjacent and can be accessed via the Monsal Trail. OS Sheet 119, SK 120 727, SK 140 731, SK 147 730 respectively.

Waitby Greenriggs (c) Cumbria WT



17 Waitby Greenriggs
Cumbria Wildlife Trust

Waitby Greenriggs occupies an old railway line. The cuttings and embankments have developed a very diverse grassland flora with over 200 species of flowering plant recorded. June is when the majority of orchid species flower including northern marsh, fragrant, common spotted, fly, lesser butterfly and frog orchid.

Where is it? SW of Kirkby Stephen. OS Sheet 91, NY 757 086

Bird's nest orchid (c) Philip Precey



18 Chafford Gorges nature park
Essex Wildlife Trust

The 200 acres of former chalk quarries, dominated by several large lakes, woodland and chalk cliffs, boast a variety of orchid species including man, common spotted, common twayblade, bee, bird's nest, pyramidal orchid, green flowered, marsh and broad leaved helleborine.

Where is it? Drake Rd, Chafford Hundred, Grays, Thurrock, RM16 7RG. Grid ref: TQ 599 793

Fly orchid (c) Philip Precey



19 Elliott (Swift's Hill) nature reserve
Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust

One of the county's finest wildflower grasslands and an important site for butterflies. Over 150 species of wildflower thrive here, including 13 kinds of orchid. Common spotted, pyramidal and early purple are widespread, with fragrant, bee, fly, green-winged, musk and frog less commonly seen.

Where is it? Lies on the eastern side of the Slad Valley, near Stroud. Grid ref: SO 875 085

Noar Hill (c) Hants & IOW WT



20 Noar Hill
Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust

Orchids draw many visitors to the hill with different species in flower from April through to August. The succession of flower spikes begins with early purple in April, moving through common twayblade, fly, common spotted, fragrant, pyramidal, musk, frog orchid and finally autumn ladies tresses which begins flowering in August.

Where is it? One mile S of Selborne. Grid ref: SU 742 319

Heath spotted orchid (c) Herts & Middlesex WT



21 Frogmore Meadow
Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust

The meadow lies between the River Chess and is damp and marshy. However, there is a mosaic of damp and dry areas which is reflected in the varied flora the site supports. Amongst the wildflowers that thrive here are southern marsh and heath spotted orchids.

Where is it? Dodds Mill Lane in Chenies - accessed via Chess Valley Walk footpath. Grid ref: TQ 022 988

Early purple orchid (c) Paul Lane



22 Martin's Meadows
Suffolk Wildlife Trust

These three meadows are among the few flower-rich hay meadows still left in Suffolk. Management is by a summer hay cut followed by aftermath grazing. In spring and early summer, visitors can enjoy superb displays of wildflowers, including early purple, green winged and pyramidal orchids. In autumn the meadows bloom once more, this time with meadow saffron.

Where is it? N of Clopton and NE of Otley. Grid ref: TM 228 572

Burnt orchid (c) Les Binns



23 Clattinger Farm
Wiltshire Wildlife Trust

Clattinger Farm is breathtaking in June, when the wildflower meadows are at their most colourful. A walk around the nature reserve will offer a glimpse of plants that were once common, but some of which are now extremely rare. Several species of orchid including southern marsh and burnt orchid are amongst its treasures.

Where is it? 5.6 miles S of Cirencester. Grid ref: SU017 937

Chyverton (c) Cornwall WT



24 Chyverton reserve
Cornwall Wildlife Trust

This 10-acre reserve consists of flower-rich meadows, ancient Cornish hedgerows, areas of mixed woodland and a scrape. The southern marsh orchid likes wet and marshy ground. Its erect multi-bloomed flowering spikes vary from pale pinkish-lilac to deep mauve and can be seen from May to early summer.

Where is it? 5.9 miles NW of Truro. Grid ref: SW 791 514

Green winged orchid (c) Paul Lane



25 Stockings Meadow
Herefordshire Nature Trust

The reserve lies on a relatively steep west-facing slope leading down to the Hackley Brook, a headwater of the River Frome. The meadow has a very rich flora, including green winged orchids in the deeper, heavier soils at the bottom of the meadow and common spotted and heath spotted orchids in marshy areas.

Where is it? 1 mile W of Bromyard. Grid ref: SO 633 546

Northern marsh orchid (c) Philip Precey



26 Close Sartfield reserve
Manx Wildlife Trust

The reserve consists of damp hay meadows, marshy grassland, curragh (willow scrub) and developing birch woodland. The flora of the hay meadows is outstanding from late May to July when tens of thousands of orchids, including heath spotted, early marsh, common spotted, northern marsh and common twayblade, are in bloom.

Where is it? Between Ballaugh Village and Sulby Glen. Grid ref: SC 361 956

Common spotted orchids (c) Herts & Middlesex WT



27 Blagrove Common
Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust

One of the few remaining areas of unimproved marshy grassland on poorly drained boulder clay. The marshy areas are dominated by rushes and tufted hairs grass. At its best in late spring, when the marshy grassland is covered in large numbers of early marsh, southern marsh and common spotted orchids, as well as their hybrids.

Where is it? Green End near Sandon. Grid ref: TL 328 337

Cae Bryntywarch (c) Brecknock WT



28 Cae Bryntywarch
Brecknock Wildlife Trust

This wildflower meadow has always been managed traditionally with grazing by cattle or ponies from spring to autumn. It's home to a range of colourful plants. In spring it is flecked with the pinks of common spotted and heath spotted orchids, which are then followed by the yellows of bog asphodel and dyer's greenweed.

Where is it? 2 miles SW of Trecastle. Grid ref: SN 853 267



Pentwyn Farm (c) Stuart Smith

29 Pentwyn Farm
Gwent Wildlife Trust

Visit in spring to see colourful fields full of cowslips and early purple orchids in the hedgerows. Later, thousands of green-winged orchids start to appear. The display continues into summer, when a variety of other orchids, including greater butterfly orchid and twayblade, can be seen amidst a carpet of knapweed, ox-eye daisy, hay rattle and eyebright..
Where is it? Penallt village. Grid ref: SO 523 094



Fragrant orchid (c) Philip Precey

30 Howell Hill reserve
Surrey Wildlife Trust

Howell Hill is managed to maintain the range of habitats and to conserve the rich chalk flora. Some 260 kinds of flowering plants have been recorded here, including man, common spotted, fragrant, pyramidal and white helleborine orchids as well as two species of broomrape.
Where is it? Sutton. Access between Cheam Road and Northey Avenue Grid ref: TQ 238 618



Man orchid (c) WWWT / S Trotter

31 Ufton Fields
Warwickshire Wildlife Trust

Ufton Fields is a splendid site restored from a disused limestone quarry. The reserve has abundant orchids including butterfly, twayblade, common and marsh spotted and the rare man orchid. Well worth a visit in spring and summer.
Where is it? 0.5 km S of Ufton, near Southam. Grid ref: SP 378 615



Carr House Meadows (c) Sheffield WT

32 Carr House Meadows
Sheffield Wildlife Trust

A rare example of the flower rich fields that were a once common sight, the meadows abound with colour – bluebells, yellow rattle, swathes of red and white clover, scabious and orchids can all be found here, as well as the bright pink marsh-loving ragged robin, a rarity in the area. Southern marsh and common spotted orchid can be found throughout the growing season.
Where is it? 7.5 miles NW of Sheffield. Grid ref: SK 282 953



Greater butterfly orchid (c) Bruce Shortland

33 Warburg Nature Reserve
Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust

A magical place to visit throughout the year with excellent visitor facilities. Orchids are in abundance here, including bird's nest, greater and lesser butterfly, fly and pyramidal orchid, as well as broad leaved, narrow lipped and violet helleborine.
Where is it? 4 miles NW of Henley-on-Thames. Grid ref: SU 720 879



Frog orchid (c) Bruce Shortland

34 Winks Meadow
Suffolk Wildlife Trust

The meadow supports a wide range of plants characteristic of ancient unimproved grassland including seven species of orchid. The first to flower in late spring and early summer are twayblade, early purple and green winged orchid. Later in the summer common spotted, bee, and pyramidal orchid appear together with the only colony of frog orchid in Suffolk.
Where is it? Between Diss and Halesworth. Grid ref: TM 306 798

Southern marsh orchid (c) Amy Lewis



35 Wilwell Farm Cutting
Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust

This interesting abandoned railway cutting contains a wide variety of habitats and covers approximately 8 hectares. One of the best wildflower sites in Nottinghamshire with more than 230 species so far recorded. Orchids include green winged orchid and small colonies of bee, twayblade and southern marsh orchid.

Where is it? Between Ruddington and Wilford. Grid ref: SK 568 352

Latterbarrow reserve (c) Cumbria WT



36 Latterbarrow reserve
Cumbria Wildlife Trust

Latterbarrow is home to an amazing variety of plants with over 200 species recorded. The grasslands have a succession of flowers throughout the summer, starting with early purple orchid and cowslip in May followed by fly, greater butterfly and fragrant orchids in June.

Where is it? Lies between Grange over Sands and Kendal at Witherslack. OS Sheet 97, SD 440 827

Pyramidal orchid (c) Paul Lane



37 Wharram Quarry
Yorkshire Wildlife Trust

The reserve is a chalk quarry of four hectares, facing south-west, last worked in the 1940s. A flat floor and step cliff-face with hollows scooped out of it provide a variation in habitat conditions. Pyramidal and spotted-orchids occur and, in some years, there is an abundant display of bee orchids, whose flowers mimic bees to attract pollinators.

Where is it? 7 miles E of Malton. Grid ref: SE 858 653

Bee orchid (c) Neil Aldridge



38 Rose End Meadows
Derbyshire Wildlife Trust

Made up of 11 small fields, each meadow is different because of varying soil quality and depth. In spring and early summer, the meadows are a vivid mixture of yellow, white and blue, because of the wide variety of wildflowers. The main period for orchids is midsummer - among the species found here are pyramidal, bee and common spotted orchids.

Where is it? Above Cromford village. Grid ref: SK 293 567

Oxley Meadow (c) Alan Brown



39 Oxley Meadow
Essex Wildlife Trust

This 8 acre reserve consists of two flower-rich meadows, the larger one almost completely surrounded by wide luxuriant hedgerows. A large colony of green-winged orchids are abundant across the meadows from April to June, making this site one of the few places in Essex to see the species which has declined steadily in England as a result of habitat loss

Where is it? Tolleshunt Knights near Tiptree. Grid ref: TL 918 149

The Orchid Glade (c) Geoff Trinder



40 Whisby Nature Park
Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust

This complex of flooded gravel pits with excellent visitor facilities supports a range of orchid species including bee orchids. In June and July, the Orchid Glade is spectacular with up to 9,000 southern marsh orchids.

Where is it? 7 miles south-west of the Lincoln. Grid ref: SK 911 661