

Why is Britain a wildlife migration hotspot?

Video transcript for introduction presented by Chris Packham

Now we like to think that a lot of the wildlife in the UK here is ours.

The robin for example is a classic British bird that lives its entire life here, or does it?

Most of the robins that we see are solely UK residents, but in the winter they are joined by migrant birds that come from continental Europe, Scandinavia, even Russia.

That said some of our female robins do pop across the channel for a sunny winter break down in Spain and Portugal.

But you know in fact just under a third of all of the birds we have here in the UK migrate here.

And perhaps the most impressive example is the swallow of the sea: the Arctic tern.

Now every spring these birds travel an incredible 20,000 miles from the Antarctic Ocean all the way back here to the UK to breed, it's the longest migration recorded of any animal on Earth.

In a single lifetime these birds can migrate over one and a half million miles, that's the equivalent of flying to the moon and back three times.

The Arctic tern isn't the only bird that covers vast distances to reach these shores. Think of those other classic migratory species such as the swifts and the swallows, and then of course there is that harbinger of spring the cuckoo.

Because like the swifts and swallows it covers a grueling distance all the way from Africa to get here.

And what about our winter visitors, well we are joined by millions of wading birds that can be seen around the coast and our many estuaries each year.

We also get throngs of thrushes such as fieldfare and red wing and they arrive from Scandinavia and Europe.

But migration isn't only limited to birds the painted lady butterfly and the silver Y moth arrive here each summer in their tens, perhaps hundreds of millions.

For any animal migration is one of the most dangerous times in their lives.

Swallows and cuckoos must cross the great Sahara desert where water and food are scarce; whereas those Arctic terns zigzag across vast oceans covering 40,000 miles on a round trip.

Sadly a great number don't survive that journey, but through new scientific techniques like satellite tracking we're beginning to learn a lot more about these migratory animals.

But the big question remains: why do so many millions of them risk so much to get here to the UK.

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