Ayrshire Reserves

The reserves are open every day all year round and entry is free to all visitors.

Events and activities

To find out what’s on at the reserves, visit scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/events

Local groups

Passionate about the wildlife of Scotland? Join our Ayrshire Group - run by volunteers, we are active in local conservation projects: planning, fundraising and organising events to inspire and engage people in Ayrshire.

Health and safety

• Please keep to the footpaths for your own safety and to protect sensitive plants and animals.
• Dogs must be under close control (on a lead if necessary) to avoid disturbance of livestock, birds and other wildlife. Please remove dog mess.
• Be vigilant about ticks, which may be present on the undergrowth.

Enjoy Scotland's outdoors responsibly, visit outdooraccess-scotland.com

For information on places to see near you, visit our website: scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/visit

You might also like to visit...

Falls of Clyde Visitor Centre
Visit for waterfalls, walks and wildlife. Look out for dipper, kingfishers and otters. Join the ranger for badge watching and other events. New Lanark ML11 9DB T 01555 665 262 E FallsOfClyde@scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk @FallsOfClyde

Montrose Basin Visitor Centre
Spectacular views over the wildlife reserve, exhibitions with interactive displays and a host of children’s activities. Montrose DD10 9TX T 01674 676 336 E montrosebasin@scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk @MontroseBasin

Loch of the Lowes Visitor Centre
Interactive displays tell the story of Lowes and its wildlife - otters, red squirrels, beavers and much more. Observation hides over the loch. Dunkeld PH8 0HH T 01350 727 337 E lochofthelowes@scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk @LochoftheLowes

Explore the wilder side of Ayrshire

Discover special places for wildlife and for people, on your doorstep.

Mammals

Dear, New, hares and small mammals such as mice and voles find safe havens in the woods and meadows of our reserves.

Birds

Each reserve has a rich and varied collection of birds all year round, from resident robins and wrens to visiting little egrets.

Trees

Trees are the foundation of many of our reserves, with hundreds of species depending on them for survival.

Wildflowers

Wildflowers provide food for mammals and caterpillars, whilst birds and small mammals rely on their seeds and berries in winter.

Pollinators

Bees, butterflies and hoverflies benefit from a profusion of flowers and nesting sites across our reserves.

Woodlands

Rich and diverse, woodlands support special and often spectacular wildlife, and more insect species than any other habitat. Deadwood is an important part of a woodland, providing shelter and food for many species.

Wetlands

Wet conditions promote luxuriant vegetation where many creatures can safely set up home. Boggy ground and tangles of willows mean that disturbance by people is minimal.

Meadows

The Trust grazes or cuts meadows on reserves to prevent grass from smothering the wildflowers or scrub from taking over. There may be horses, sheep or cattle present, depending on the goal.

Rivers and Ponds

Water greatly increases a site’s species diversity: it teems with tiny life forms, which are a source of food for larger species. At the top of the chain are mammals and birds, who also use it for drinking and bathing.
Ayr Gorge Woodlands
The reserve features a steep ravine of sandstone cliffs covered mainly with oak, ash and some very old magmatic beeches. It is one of the most important ancient woodlands in Ayrshire for invertebrates, plants, fungi and bats. This reserve is on the popular River Ayr Way walking route.

Access: surfaced footpaths, including several steep sections and steps.
Duration: Allow 1 to 3 hours.
Location: KA26 0RE, nearest town Barrhill.

Auchalton Meadow
This flower-rich reserve is on the site of 19th Century lime workings. Kils, spoil mounds, tracks and a small quarry can still be seen. Orchids, including fragrant orchid and greater butterfly orchid, thrive in these impoverished soils. During the summer, the wildflowers attract large numbers of pollinating insects, including butterflies such as Scotch argus (pictured).
Access: mostly level but no footpaths. Livestock may be present.
Duration: Allow 1 to 2 hours.
Location: KA19 7QF, nearest town Crosshill.

Corsehillmuir Wood
This natural woodland reserve sits in the famously pastoral landscape of North Ayrshire. Its canopy of mature birch, ash, alder and willow shelters a moosy and ferny ground flora and woodland birds thrive here.
Access: surfaced footpaths with only one steep section.
Duration: 30 minutes but close to Eglinton Country Park for a longer route.
Location: KA13 7LA, nearest town Kilwinning.

Dalmellington Moss
This reserve is a raised bog on the floodplain of the River Doon. Hummocks of heather and dewgrass are interspersed with waterlogged hollows full of Sphagnum mosses and cotton grass, allowing beetles, spiders and dragonflies to thrive. Specialised bog plants, such as bog rosemary (pictured), do well in these conditions.
Access: no footpaths and ground very boggy.
Duration: Allow 1 hour.
Location: KA46 7PY, nearest town Dalmellington.

Feoch Meadows
A mosaic of dry and wet grassland, fen meadow and mire characterise the reserve. There is an orchid-rich area on the banks of the Feoch Burn. Traditional livestock farming, without the addition of modern chemicals, ensures an abundance of wildflowers and insects. This site is particularly good for butterflies and moths.
Access: no footpaths and ground is very boggy in places. Livestock usually present.
Duration: Allow 1 to 3 hours.
Location: KA26 ORJ, nearest town Barrhill.

Gailes Marsh
This reserve features dry coastal grassland, marshland and a pond, all sheltered by mixed woodland. The species-rich grassland attracts many butterflies, bees, hoverflies and other pollinating insects. Mining bees (pictured) in particular find the conditions favourable for nesting.
Access: level ground but no footpaths. Horses may be present.
Duration: Allow 1 hour.
Location: KA11 5AE, nearest town Irvine.

Garnock Floods
Garnock Floods is a low-lying floodplain pasture with shallow pools and marshy areas. The reserve is grazed by cattle to keep the ground suitable for the wildfowl and waders that flock here during winter. Kingfishers have been seen along the river and songbirds, such as grasshopper warbler (pictured), heard in the surrounding scrub woodland.
Access: viewing hide and short, unsurfaced footpath. Cattle may be present.
Duration: Allow 1 hour to visit the hide and short riverbank trail.
Location: KA12 8SP, nearest town Irvine.

Grey Hill Grasslands
The ultrabasic serpentinite rock foundation makes this reserve a botanical hotspot. Species-rich grassland, heath and mire support many rare plants, including the nationally scarce spring sandwort (pictured). The hilltop route provides opportunities to take in the impressive views of Arran, Ailsa Craig and the Clyde coast.
Access: no footpaths on this steep hill.
Livestock usually present.
Duration: Allow 3 to 4 hours.
Location: KA26 GHT (for parking - access is 1 mile from here), nearest town Girvan.

Knockshinnoch Lagoons
Open water, marshland and reedbeds make this reserve important for birdlife in the Nith Valley, especially during their autumn migration. Plant and insect enthusiasts can enjoy the partially vegetated coal-spoil heap in the main public area of the reserve.
Access: mostly level, surfaced paths and two viewing hides.
Duration: Allow 1 to 2 hours.
Location: KA18 4NE, nearest town New Cumnock.

Lawthorn Wood
This reserve is a small, mature deciduous woodland. The tall canopy is mainly made up of old trees provide crevices for birds and bats, and the great spotted woodpecker (pictured).
Access: level, unsurfaced footpath.
Duration: 15 minutes but close to Soureil Wood and Eglinton Country Park for a longer route.
Location: KA11 2AT, nearest town Irvine.

Oldhall Ponds
A mosaic of woodland and tussocky grassland surrounds the two ponds of this reserve. The open water and emergent vegetation are attractive to breeding and wintering waterfowl and other pond life, including dragonflies and damselflies.
Access: level, surfaced footpath.
Duration: 30 minutes but close to Shewalton Wood for a longer route.
Location: KA11 5DH, nearest town Irvine.

Perceton Wood
This long-established plantation originated as part of the nearby Perceton House estate. The old trees provide crevices for birds and bats, and the plentiful deadwood supports insects and fungi. The carpet of lye gives way to a natural ground flora interspersed with attractive garden plants. There is a small pond.
Access: level, unsurfaced footpath.
Duration: Allow 30 minutes.
Location: KA11 2AQ, nearest town Irvine.

Shewalton Sandpits
Fashioned out of disused sand and gravel pits in the 1980s, the sandbanks, ponds, woodland and riverbank here are now a haven for invertebrates, plants and birds. The sheltered conditions mean that butterflies and dragonflies can be numerous on a sunny day.
Access: level, unsurfaced footpaths.
Duration: Allow 1 hour.
Location: KA11 5AB, nearest town Irvine.

Shewalton Wood
With its woodland, grassland and wetland areas, this reserve hosts many small mammals, amphibians and songbirds, which attract birds of prey and other predators. A network of water-filled channels and two large ponds provide an ideal habitat for frogs, dragonflies and damselflies.
Access: level, surfaced footpath.
Duration: Allow 1 to 2 hours.
Location: KA11 5AT, nearest town Irvine.

Soureil Wood
Soureil Wood is an attractive native woodland that has developed on a derelict coal yard. There is a small area of grassland, a large pond and a good supply of deadwood that benefits invertebrates, which attract songbirds and bats.
Access: level, surfaced footpath.
Duration: 15 minutes but close to Lawthorn Wood and Eglinton Country Park for a longer route.
Location: KA11 2AV, nearest town Irvine.