Trip to Wales – Alex and Betsan

The UK is, unfairly, rarely considered a particularly exciting place for nature and wildlife. It can often be difficult, especially as young people, to experience truly diverse parts of the natural environment that areas of the country have to offer – but we both think it is very important to appreciate and spend time with the natural world whenever possible. Upon finding out about the funding offered by the Henry Morris Trust, we decided to apply and plan a trip to Wales.

South Wales made an ideal choice, because as well as being a beautiful area of the UK, it is relatively easy to get to, with a direct train from London making for an efficient and simple journey. While travel was quite simple, Wales is far enough away from home that we could experience a very different environment that isn't present around where we live. The coast is home to seabird colonies of dozens of species, and the hills and forest environments inland provide a much-needed refuge for species that are scarce in other parts of the country.

In the summer months, migratory birds thrive in the south of Wales; puffins, razorbills, and guillemots spend March-July on the coast and islands around Pembrokeshire. For this reason, along with the convenience of a school holiday, we decided to plan our trip for July.

25th July 2026

In the morning, we both took a train into London individually and met at London Paddington station, where we then boarded our train to Swansea. After a bite to eat we took buses to Clydach and then to Craig-cefn-parc, where we were to stay for the next four days. While in Clydach, we shopped for a few affordable meals to have during the trip.

26th July 2026

We started Sunday by heading out to walk down from Craig-cefn-parc to the edge of Clydach, where we would spend the day walking through the RSPB Cwm Clydach nature reserve. This reserve is notable for being one of the best places in the UK to see birds like grey wagtails and white-throated dippers, both of which prefer upland streams, like those found here.

We were struck by the charm of the reserve with beautiful streams, woods, hills, and fields, all of which provided excellent opportunities to spot local wildlife. As well as seeing plenty of livestock animals like donkeys, cows, and sheep, we saw dozens of swallows over the hilly fields, buzzards soaring above the woods, and several grey wagtails around the water. The latter in particular made for a great sight as they can be hard to find around Cambridgeshire, and RSPB Cwm Clydach may be the best place in the UK to find them.

We ended up walking around the reserve and the area around Clydach for about six hours, birdwatching and taking in the beautiful landscape.







27th July 2026

On the Monday we headed from Craig-cefn-parc to Clydach, Swansea and then to Mumbles by bus. After a while on the bus, we spent a few hours walking and exploring much of the coastline, enjoying the view and looking out for any wildlife. After enjoying lunch at the seafront, we saw many birds like herring gulls and black-headed gulls perched on the rocks by the seafront and up to the pier, including juveniles of several species.







Juvenile black-headed gull

28th July 2026

Tuesday started early for us, as we travelled to the Pembrokeshire coast in the morning. We had booked tickets for a boat trip around Skomer Island to see seabirds and other marine wildlife. Arriving around Martin's Haven, we first walked around the area, including up to the lookout station, which gave some amazing views of the coast and of some cows grazing near the edge. Before our boat arrived, we took some time to visit the barn swallows that were nesting in nearby buildings, as well as watch the coast for seabirds, and were lucky enough to spot an oystercatcher on the rocks.

Late July would usually be too late in the year to see many puffins on Skomer. However, this year, the birds were blown off course on arrival by strong winds, meaning their

leaving had been delayed by a few weeks, and we got to see thousands. Puffins were fishing in the sea, nesting in burrows on the cliffs, and even flying over our boat, a few carrying fish in their mouths!

While the puffins were the highlight of the boat trip, we also got to see black-legged kittiwakes, herring gulls, cormorants, grey seals, and a peregrine falcon around the island.

The tour guide was very helpful and engaging; he told us lots of facts about the island itself, the sea around it and the birds that stay there. For example, he talked about how the area was, historically, a notorious place for shipwrecks.

At one point, a herring gull landed on his head, as he had made friends with it over the many trips to the island.







Group of puffins

<u>Final Thoughts</u>

On reflection, we found this a very worthwhile experience and we fulfilled our goals. This trip granted us not only the possibility to see and learn more about British birds and British wildlife in general (and see some uncommon birds that you would likely not get the chance to see in Cambridge, like grey wagtails and puffins), but we also think it was significant it what it allowed for us in terms of personal development. We were able to expand our horizons through exploring many new areas of Wales and having some fascinating novel experiences while doing so. Our independence in the planning and organising of the trip will have helped us improve these skills which will come in very handy in the near future, whether that is at university or adult life in general. Our freedom in choice surrounding the trip was also very thrilling because it allowed us to pursue a common interest, learning more about it from the new experiences and from each other.