

Top tent-life tips

Picking a pitch

Avoid setting up close to tracks which lead to cover, woods or water. They are likely to be used by foxes, badgers, wild boar and deer and the like. And while near-death trampling stories can be exciting to re-tell, stark fear will probably be uppermost if a large mammal plunges past in the dark. Such obstructions can also disturb animals with young to feed or defend, putting the babies at risk or driving them away. So, keep tents away from obvious wildlife routes. Instead, visit quietly, especially around dawn or dusk, to catch one of summer's most uplifting wild sights: animal families at play.

Pitches close to gurgling water aren't recommended. The sound may soothe you to sleep, but only until the midges and mosquitoes, which favour damp places, decide (a) it's snack time and (b) you're the snack.

Think about what's on the ground that's going to be under your ground-sheet. Moles can produce a surprising bump in the night and wood ants – black with red middles – are inclined to deal aggressively with invaders.

Unwelcome visitors

Resist the temptation to kill any mini-beasts that get into your tent – ants, bees, damselflies, moths, wasps, spiders. Fair's fair – they were there first. Most do no harm and can be removed easily. Tempt them into an upturned cup, slide a sheet of paper under it, then release the visitor outside, well away from your pitch.

If a wasp gets into a tent – don't panic. Simply back away quietly, leaving the tent flaps wide open. Flailing around and attacking will only encourage the wasp do likewise. And even if the wasp is walloped, there's no guarantee you'll find its corpse, with its still working sting

Beware of the...

There's not much SW wildlife that will cause lasting harm; the biggest hazard is actually very small: parasitical **ticks** often found on deer and which can jump to humans. They appear as a jet black full-stop, usually where the body is warmest (armpits, groin), growing larger as they suck in blood. To remove, grip the tick firmly, twist anti-clockwise and then pull, using tea tree oil or Vaseline as a lubricant if available. If an infection, or flu-like symptoms, develops, see a medic immediately.



adder
photo: Pete Evans



British cave dwelling spider



southern emerald damselfly
photo: Mike Dimery

Camp kitchens

Add fun and flavour to campfire meals by downloading a free wild food cookery book from <http://www.countrylovers.co.uk/wildfoodjj/fastfood.pdf>

Don't eat any unfamiliar plants or berries, and be very very wary of fungi. Eat a wrong 'un and you may never eat again.

Hedgerow first aid

Forget dock leaves. Nature's best remedy for nettle stings and bug bites is plantain – the big, well-ribbed, broad-leafed English wild plant, that is, not the Caribbean relative of the banana. Plantain juice is an antiseptic and anti-histamine. To extract it, fold, crush and rub a leaf vigorously then dribble the liquid over the affected area.

For minor cuts and bleeding, use the juice of yarrow or shepherd's purse. Both are mildly antiseptic, with pain-killing and blood-staunching qualities that have been used on battlefields since wars began.

Entertaining tonight

Who whooooo'd? Night time is the right time to pass time listening for and trying to ID wildlife noises. The bark of a fox; the boombox bay of a stag. Don't expect a 'too wit to woo', though. There are five species of owl in Britain but none has read a nursery book. The most common – the tawny owl – will have a stab at a "hoo hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo" but "kew-wick" is more usual.

Score maximum points if you're fortunate enough to hear a nightingale – rare, beautiful and memorable.

At the coast, if you hear a noise like a part inflated balloon being stretched then let go, watch for the sea-birds that make it – manx shearwaters – returning to land, often in impressively large numbers.

Campfires and lanterns will attract ghostly flights of apparently suicidal moths. Use white sheets to shield them from flames, then sit back and count how many of Britain's 2,500 moth species you have saved.

Shop locally

Buying local produce adds a sense of place, reduces fuel miles, traffic and pollution and encourages farmers to manage their land in wildlife-friendly ways. It usually tastes good, too.

For BBQs, look for charcoal from local woodlands.

Leave only footprints

Take care to clean up carefully when you strike camp. Abandoned cans, plastics, cloths, rope, rubber footwear, lost tent pegs and the like can kill or seriously injure wildlife, especially if the waste is swallowed or gets wrapped around limbs



tawny owl



fly agaric – poisonous!



fox