

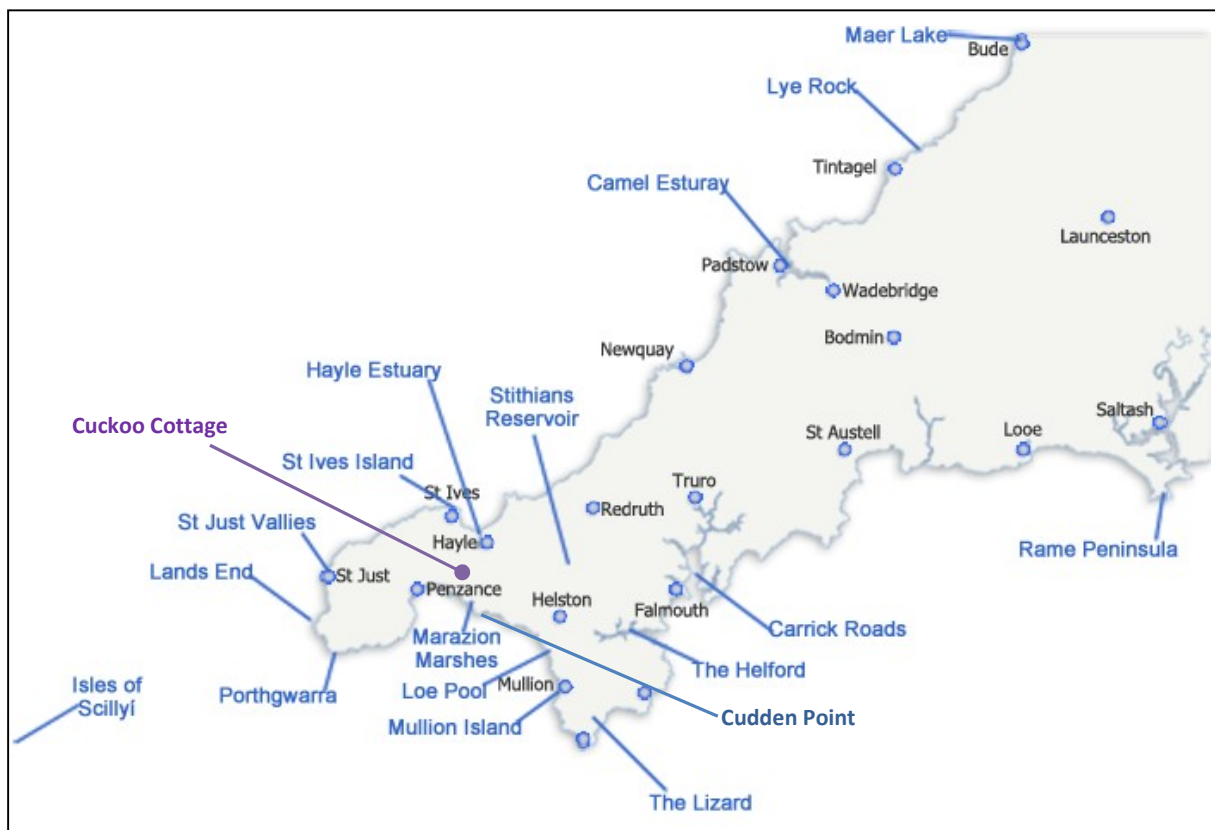
Bird Watching at Cuckoo Cottage, Crowlas

Cuckoo Cottage is perfectly located to explore the many and varied bird watching areas in West Cornwall: from the cliff top coastal paths, the RSPB reserves at the Hayle Estuary and Marazion Marshes, to inland rivers and extensive moorland.

Below are a few places that have been recommended by the following websites, all of which contain more extensive and detailed information:

1. The Cornish Bird Blog: Top ten bird watching sites in Cornwall
<https://cornishbirdblog.com/2019/02/15/ten-top-birdwatching-sites-cornwall/>
2. Cornwall Guide: Bird watching in Cornwall
<https://www.cornwalls.co.uk/wildlife/birdwatching>
3. Fat birder: Cornwall
<https://fatbirder.com/world-birding/europe/united-kingdom/england/cornwall/>

Some of the sites recommended by the Cornwall Guide are given below:



Marazion Marsh

Marazion Marsh is the most southerly RSPB reserve in the UK and about 2 miles from Cuckoo Cottage. It is famous for Aquatic Warblers (of which more than 170 have been spotted on the site) and, more recently, the presence of rare Bittern, for which the EU has granted the site SPA (Special Protection Area) status. In the autumn, murmurations of starlings can be spectacular. The reserve, which stands opposite St Michael's Mount, is a rich freshwater habitat that incorporates Cornwall's largest reedbed.



To find the Marazion Marshes RSPB reserve (TR17 0AA), follow the A30 south to the first roundabout and take the second exit to Marazion and then left at the T-junction. Marazion car parks are well signposted at the junction. The first car park is on the right. After parking, walk back onto the main road and turn right. Continue down this road towards Marazion and you will find the viewing bay on your left, followed further down the road by the entrance gate to the reserve.

Heron nests here (unusually, as they normally build their nests high in trees), while Cetti's Warbler (who breed on the site), Spotted Crake, Chiffchaff and Little Egret are among the other more exciting residents. Great swirling flocks of several million Starling come here to roost in the run up to Christmas and New Year, closely watched by their predators, such as Sparrowhawk and Peregrines, an unmissable sight, while autumn sees the passage of common waders such as Sanderling, as well as Sea Ducks and Grebes. Recent rarities have included the Citrine Wagtail and Paddyfield Warbler.

Only a road separates the marsh from the sea, and Great Northern and Black Throated Divers as well as unusual Gulls, such as Glaucous and Mediterranean, have all been spotted. The marsh is open at all times and has an extensive network of wooden walkways and viewing hides.

If you have time, visit Marazion, which has various places to eat and good local shops. If the tide is out then you can walk the causeway to St Michael's Mount (if the tide turns, there are ferries available for your return journey).

Hayle Estuary

Hayle Estuary is a nationally renowned RSPB nature reserve incorporating a variety of habitats and is only 4 miles from Cuckoo Cottage. During cold winters up to 18,000 birds can be found here, on what is the most southerly estuary in the UK and one of the few that never freezes. The site, which

has SSSI status in order to protect wintering wildfowl and waders, includes Ryan's Field, an enclosed area across the road from the main estuary that can be viewed from a purpose-built RSPB hide.



To find the Hayle Estuary RSPB reserve (TR27 6JF), follow the A30 north to the first roundabout and take the second exit B3301 to Hayle. After half a mile, take the first right at the brown sign for the RSPB Hayle Estuary Nature Reserve into Chenhall's Road. After about 300 metres, the RSPB centre is on the right and clearly signed with parking available.

In the spring and autumn look out for migrating waders, gulls and terns, while in the summer, if you are very lucky, you may even spot an Osprey. As well as rarities, the estuary is home to numerous colourful residents, including Curlew, Little Egret, Oyster Catchers and flocks of Widgeon.

Across the harbour the excellent bird watching conditions continue along Copperhouse Creek, which runs the length of the town. The eastern end of the creek is best at high tide when waders and gulls gather on exposed grassy areas, while the western end is famous for its rare birds of passage, such as the long-staying Ring-Billed Gull and the Pied-Billed Grebe, many of whom commute between the creek and the estuary.

Both sites are good for walking, with pushchair-friendly paths, and Hayle can be easily accessed from the A30. If you want further excitement, try the Karting Centre, a little further along Chenhall's Road.

Cudden Point and Piskies Cove

Cudden Point is a prominent headland 6 miles from Cuckoo Cottage. The headland is owned by the National Trust together with Little Cudden and Piskies Cove. The area is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The Cornish Chough has been sighted here.



To drive to Piskies Cove and Cudden Point (TR20 9PF), go south on the A30 and at the first roundabout take the first exit sign posted Helston A394. After a further 4.5 miles, at the fish and chip shop in Rosudgeon, turn right, sign posted Prussia Cove. Keep driving along the lane for about 1 mile and the road runs into a car park. It's about ½ mile walk from the car park to Piskies Cove, with Cudden Point further along the coastal path.

According to the Cornish Bird web site, this is one of their favourite places, especially for an evening walk in the summer, and it is a place where they have regularly seen one of Britain's rarest birds – the Cornish Chough: "There is nothing quite like seeing this illusive bird swooping across the sky and hearing its distinctive call."

Cudden Point is a great place for sunsets and there is a legend of buried treasure on the beach, following the sinking of a ship carrying the local Lord of Pengerswick Castle. Some local fishermen have reportedly heard the ghostly sound of laughter and the clinking of glasses coming up from the watery depths where the boat sank, filled with treasure and a solid silver table.

Loe Pool and Loe Bar

Loe means pool in Cornish so should be referred to as "the Loe". The Loe is the largest freshwater lake in Cornwall and is 12 miles from Cuckoo Cottage. Encircled by paths and woodland walks, the Loe encompasses a variety of wildlife habitats including swamp, deciduous woodland and open water, the Loe, lends itself perfectly to bird watching. Thought to have been created in the 12th century, when violent storms cut off the Cober Valley from the sea and created a massive shingle bank, known as Loe Bar, the Loe rests in the centre of an attractive estate now owned and managed by the National Trust.



To get to the Loe, aim for the National Trust Penrose Estate (TR13 ORD) or take the coastal path from Porthleven (great fish and chip shop – one of our favourites) using the First Down's Car Park on Loe Bar Road (TR13 9ES). From the Cottage, go south on the A30 and at the first roundabout take the first exit sign posted Helston A394. After a further 9.5 miles turn right, signposted Porthleven B3304 (Historic Harbour). When you arrive at the harbour follow the B3304 to the left towards the Penrose Estate. After ¼ mile turn right onto Shubberies Hill (badly signposted Loe Bar) and immediately left at the thatched white cottage for the National Trust Car Park. Alternatively, when you get to Porthleven, turn right at Boots and take the Harbour Road. This route is narrow in places but leads around the Church to Cliff Road. From Cliff Road, take the right hand fork at the Y junction into Loe Bar Road which leads to the car park. Then take the coastal path to the Loe, which is about a ½ mile walk.

Once at the Loe, a well-maintained footpath runs around the perimeter of the lake (a distance of around seven miles), taking in the great bar itself, as well as Carminowe Creek, Loe Marsh - a great silted area where trees grow out of the mud in a fashion that is strangely reminiscent of a mangrove swamp - and Degibna Wood, where huge numbers of Cormorants can often be seen nesting in trees by the water's edge. Look out for a well-placed hide shortly after Helston Lodge, with its picturesque boathouse, from where you may well spot Widgeon, Teal, Pochard, Mallard, Tufted Duck, Coot and Shoveler.

Porthleven is an excellent place to visit. The church at the end of the harbour is often photographed during storms, as the waves crash into the harbour wall, sometimes engulfing the church itself.

Porthgwarra

Porthgwarra is 14 miles from Cuckoo Cottage and famous for its unusual seabirds, migrants which often turn up in spring or autumn after a southerly storm to take refuge in the sheltered hollows of this long and unspoilt valley.



Porthgwarra (TR19 6JR) is a small coastal village situated between Land's End and Porthcurno. Access to the cove is via a minor road off the B3283 road at Polgigga and leads to the car park in the village.

Culminating in Gwennap Head, a large, rocky promontory uniquely situated at the meeting point between the English Channel and the Celtic Sea, some of Porthgwarra's more exciting past rarities include Soft-Plumaged Petrel and Black-Browed Albatross, while a pair of Hoopoes took up residence for several days in 2002 in a tiny patch of woodland known as the '60 foot cover'.

The valley offers a variety of habitats. The top, north-westerly side, is composed of open access heather moorland, a typical rugged Cornish cliff top which plays host to breeding Skylarks in summer, as well as resident Stonechat, Linnet and birds of prey, passing Wheatear and the occasional Autumn Snow Bunting. Tucked away among the heather at the landward edge of the moor is a tiny pool, dry in summer, and popular with Shrikes in autumn. The grassy car park at the mouth of the valley regularly produces rarities such as Yellow-Browed or Dusky Warbler and Red-Eyed Vireo, while Gwennap Head is a top site for Cory's Shearwater.

Land's End and Sennen Cove

Land's End, jutting out into the Atlantic Ocean at the furthest western tip of Cornwall, is the first and last extremity of mainland Britain and a famous hotspot for rare birds of passage. It is about 14 miles from Cuckoo Cottage.



To find Land's End (TR19 7AA) follow the A30 south until you cannot go any further and park at the complex (you will have to pay), where there is an RSPB Wildlife Discovery Centre on the top of the cliffs, complete with powerful telescopes, information and a blackboard with the day's recorded sightings. Alternatively, and our preference, is to use one of the two pay and display car parks at the bottom of the cliffs in Sennen Cove (TR19 7DA), and walk along the coastal path to Land's End.

Autumn and winter are the busiest times of year for birds, when flocks of up to 100 migrating Lesser Black Backed Gulls can usually be seen feeding on an expansive sandy beach under the cliff, together with flocks of Sandwich Terns and small numbers of Sanderling and Ringed Plover. Walking between the Sennen Cove beach and the Land's End complex (a distance of about a mile), look out for small flocks of Whimbrel in spring and large numbers of Meadow Pipit in autumn, as well as the resident Wheatear, Stonechat and Linnet.

These cliffs are also home to Fulmars, Peregrine Falcons, Ravens and many different types of Gull, while the offshore Cowloes Reef is a popular roosting site for Gulls, Oystercatchers, Curlew, Whimbrel, Terns, Shags and flocks of Purple and Turnstone Sandpiper.

Gannets, Kittiwakes, Shags and Razorbills are all common out to sea, while the higher ground just inland from the cliffs and beach can yield some exciting treats, too, especially in autumn when birds such as Richard's Pipit and Lapland Bunting often become temporary residents as well as the occasional rarity such as Dotterel, Buff-Breasted Sandpiper, Dark-Bellied Brent Geese, American Golden Plover, a long-staying Dusky Warbler and a flock of Snow Bunting.