




6 places to see Hidden forests

Across the UK, hidden forests of lichen are waiting to be discovered. They thrive in almost any environment with enough light, from the rocky mosaics of dry stone walls to the gnarled bark of ancient woodlands. Lichens are fascinating things — not one organism, but a symbiotic coupling of one or more fungus species and an alga or cyanobacterium (or occasionally both). They live in harmony, the fungus providing structure and the other organism making food through photosynthesis. They're often overlooked, but closer inspection reveals a world in miniature, with lichens growing in sprawling shapes like the trunks, branches and leaves of the forests in which many of them grow. It seems as if no two lichens are alike, each patch a work of chaotic art, from moss-green cups to rust-coloured mats. With a searching eye and an open mind, lichens can brighten any walk in the wild.

Usnea florida, a beard-lichen also known as witches' whiskers, is a declining species found mainly on trees in Wales and south-west England



See the spectacle for yourself



1 Ballachuan Hazelwood, Scottish Wildlife Trust

One of Scotland's most ancient woodlands, where the hazels and rocks are dripping with lichens and mosses. It's home to over 372 different lichens, including Norwegian specklebelly, octopus suckers and elf-ears lichens.

Where: Near Oban, PA34 4RJ

2 Glenarm Nature Reserve, Ulster Wildlife Trust

This beautiful river valley is home to lichens found nowhere else in Ireland. Look for them decorating the branches of ancient oaks or coating rocks along the Glenarm River, where the rare river jelly lichen is found.

Where: Glenarm, BT44 0BD

3 Eycott Hill, Cumbria Wildlife Trust

Admire the collage of lichens along the dry stone walls, or scour the rocky outcrops to find those orange, leafy lichens that grow best on a bird's favourite perch as they thrive on the extra nitrates from droppings of meadow pipits and wheaters.

Where: Penrith, CA11 0XD

4 Roundton Hill, Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust

Once the site of an Iron Age hillfort, this impressive landscape supports almost 200 species of lichen. Look for them on the shady underhangs of volcanic rock outcrops.

Where: Church Stoke, SY15 6EL

5 Roydon Woods Nature Reserve, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust

This enchanting ancient woodland is known for its wildflowers, but the lichens draping the ageing trees are just as impressive.

Where: Brockenhurst, SO42 7UF

6 Isles of Scilly, Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust

One of the best places for lichens in the UK. The granite cairns of Peninnis Head offer a good selection, with a backdrop of spectacular sea views. The islands are also home to rare species like gilt-edged lichen.

Did you discover any lichen?

We'd love to know how your search went.

Please tweet us your best photos of the lichens that take your liking! [@wildlifetrusts](https://twitter.com/wildlifetrusts)