

The Yorkshire Dales Nature through the Year

Winter



Otter © Whitfield Benson YDNPA

The short days and long dark nights might not seem the best time for nature spotting but the lack of leaves on trees means that birds are that much easier to spot, and a covering of snow overnight will show just how busy the countryside is when we are tucked up safe in bed.

Look out for the winter sun catching the speckled breast of a Mistle Thrush, singing its heart out from the top of a tree. It is often known as the storm thrush because of its habit of singing in that eerie light just before thunderclouds roll in. For interesting facts about the Mistle Thrush visit the [RSPB website](#).



Otter footprints © YDNPA

Keep an eye open for otter footprints in the snow along river banks – this shy animal has made a strong return in the Dales but you are very unlikely to see one as they are usually only out and about at night. Finding a set of footprints is almost as thrilling as seeing the animal though, as it means the otter is thriving.

Flocks of special winter visitors like [fieldfares](#), or if you are lucky enough to see them, [waxwings](#), come down from harsher northern climes to gorge on our hedgerow berries.



Snowdrops © YDNPA

Enjoy the early snowdrops peeping though in the coldest weather. Many clumps have been naturalised alongside village walls and woodland edges. Some gardens have special open days for snowdrop viewing, for example at [Austwick Hall](#) and at [Fountains Abbey](#).



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Nuthatch © Whitfield Benson YDNPA



Flocks of blue tits, long-tailed tits, great tits, chaffinches and the occasional nuthatch or tree creeper can be spotted flitting along hedges or through trees in mixed groups, twittering and fluttering about busily looking for insects hidden in nooks and crannies. Visit the [RSPB website](#) for more information about these birds.

Early in the morning you might catch a glimpse of the white rump of a [roe deer](#) disappearing into the gloom in woodland. In Spain they are known as the ghosts of the forest. If you startle one it might bark at you – an eerie sound echoing through the still winter air.

Roe deer © Whitfield Benson YDNPA



On a cloudless night and away from the lights of town the Yorkshire Dales' night skies are a wonder to behold. Turn off your torch and just stand and stare in amazement. Use an augmented reality star chart app on your smartphone and you'll be able to name the planets and constellations twinkling above you, for example, [Star Walk for iPhone](#) or [Google Sky Map](#).

