

## A safari, or the fen?

Published: January 13, 2026, 5:17 am

---

It was a glorious day at Wicken Fen, south of Ely, yesterday:



This is an extraordinary fen landscape:



Although the open skies and reedbeds are the most obvious characteristics, the often hidden waterways make that possible, meaning that trees are also a major part of the landscape:



All of this is, however, a human-made landscape, requiring constant pumping.



The wildlife does not care:



The interaction of the people and nature also seems in balance:



And the nature reserve, which attracts a massive variety of species, works as an integrated part of the whole.



We went to hear and see warblers. We only saw chiffchaff and reed warblers, but we also heard garden, sedge, willow, and Cetti's warblers, as well as blackcaps, which are also warblers.

Marsh harriers and a single kestrel patrolled the skies.

All the usual summer ducks were there, plus pochard, which looked as though they had the intention of staying, as it is late for them to migrate now. There were males and females present to encourage that idea. The last wigeon were also still present.

Great crested and little grebe were about, the latter being regular favourites.

Great white, little and cattle egrets were all present, the last being the surprise.

But best of all was the walk. We did about five miles, and once we were a few hundred metres from the visitor centre, there were few people around, and even fewer dogs. It was remarkably peaceful, walking by water, near trees, surrounded by birdsong (chiffchaff were everywhere). Little is better for well-being than that.

We mused as we walked that we cannot work out why people spend their retirements relentlessly travelling in search of what we do not know. I often hear people of my age talking endlessly about such trips when I am out to have a coffee. What I very much suspect is that very few of those bragging about their latest climate-destroying venture will have ever walked around a place like Wicken, right on their doorstep. If you gave me a choice of a safari or Wicken, I know what I (we) would choose.