

## Tour Report Wild Devon in Summer 7 – 10 July 2025

Short-beaked common dolphin



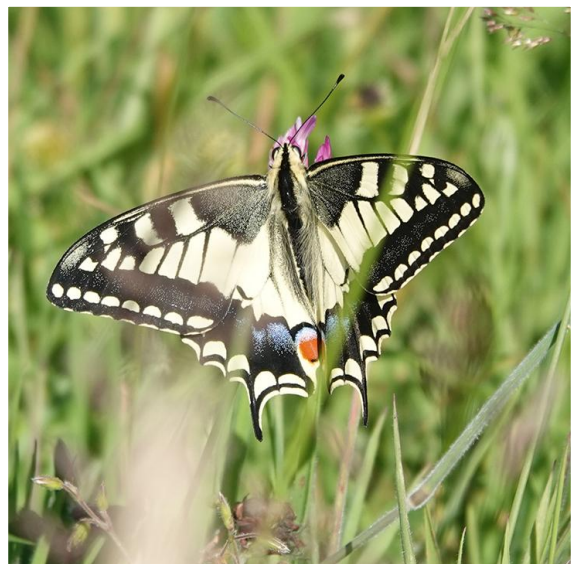
High brown fritillary



European beaver



Swallowtail butterfly



Compiled by Mike Langman

A short but fascinating tour of some of South Devon's best summer wildlife habitats, beaver watching, a boat trip with Devon Sea Safaris, and a guided stroll around Derek Gow's rewilding and breeding centre at Coombeshead.

**Monday 7 July 2025**

**Day 1:**

Bowling Green Marsh afternoon, then a river otter evening

*Sunny but breezy afternoon and evening*

Pick-ups at Exeter St Davids railway station, efficient sign-in, room allocation, then briefing, it was just a short drive to RSPB Bowling Green Marsh. Walking along the lane, several butterflies were noted; comma, gatekeeper, green-veined white, holly and common blue were of most interest. The tide was still rising as the group entered the hide, and it wasn't long before a flock of full summer plumaged black-tailed godwits dropped in. A passing buzzard flushed all the gathered black-headed gulls and godwits, revealing a lapwing, teal, little egrets and a couple of spoonbills. Checking out the estuary from the viewing platform, we added oystercatcher, curlew and shelduck onto our list. We took a brief stop back at the hide and, whilst returning to the minibus, found the hoped-for spotted redshank among the common redshank flock. We also spotted several Mediterranean gulls, a green sandpiper and a single wigeon.

A short break, log call and dinner – it's time to head out again in search of the river otter beavers!

A beautiful sunny evening stroll past the Lower Otter Restoration Project (LORP). It's hard to believe this vibrant salt marsh, until just a few years ago, was a cricket pitch and damp pasture fields. Birdlife seen: shelducks, little egrets, grey herons, sand martins, curlews and redshank. Waiting patiently for the beavers, which didn't show this evening, other wildlife included: kingfisher, mayflies, and grey mullet. Returning to the minibus at the end of the watch, a young tawny owl was calling and showing briefly. A large family group of ten or more gosander swam downriver.

**Tuesday 8 July 2025**

**Day 2:**

Dartmoor, Challacombe Farm AM & Coombeshead Rewilding project PM

*Fine, sunny, a little breezy*

Breakfast eaten and rucksacks packed for a full day out on Dartmoor and NW Devon. Picnic lunches and evening supper (from a French patisserie van and fruit shop) picked up in Moretonhampstead, then on to the Dartmoor Challacombe Farm. Stopping on open moorland below Grimspound, several key bird species found included whinchats, wheatear, stonechats, reed bunting and linnets.

Challacombe Farm was just a short drive away, and the mix of restored wet streamside bogs, open woodland fields and ponds is home to many species of invertebrates and birds. Dark green fritillaries and peacocks were on the wing. Red admirals plus many whites, meadow brown and ringlet. Around the farm and during our picnic by the pond, birds seen and heard included siskins, spotted flycatchers, raven, buzzards, treecreeper, nuthatch, many swallows and house martins. The open paddocks held both song and mistle thrush. The restored bog area was full of life, several keeled skimmers, and whirligig beetles were found. After avoiding a couple of large inquisitive horses, some sundews were located. Walking back through the farm, it was time to move on to our next destination.

At Coombeshead rewilding centre, the resident land manager and ecologist, Tay, greeted us and began his tour of the breeding species pens for reintroduction. Lots of information followed by the water voles, black and white storks, wall lizard, European lynx, 'Bronze Age' pigs, wild cats and other species. A tour of the relatively new rewilding area proved fruitful for butterflies and birds. Throughout the tour, recently released turtle doves were 'purring' in the background, others feeding on paths or flying over. More unusual and new trip species included red kite and a green sandpiper flushed from one of the relatively new ponds

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that even Tay was surprised to see. The Southern hawk dragonfly was chased by an emperor dragonfly, but most exciting was a swallowtail butterfly in the meadow. Apparently, several swallowtails were released last year, so they had presumably bred with new offspring this year.

Following the evening log call and supper in the barn area, the evening beaver watch began. The beavers moved to a different pond, so even though two beavers were seen, not everyone in the group saw them. As the light faded, a stroll back to the barns included a close encounter with three huge male water buffalo, this year on the other side of a fence!

The drive back to Exeter was livened up as a nightjar dropped into one of the country lanes. With a quick stop and some reversing and turning of the minibus, everyone saw the bird well; it really wasn't bothered by the van or its lights.

**Wednesday 9 July 2025**

**Day 3:**

Sea boat trip, RSPB Labrador Bay reserve and RSPB Aylesbeare common

*Fine, warm, then hot and sunny*

An early start for the 8 am boat trip from Teignmouth on a millpond-like sea. After a comfort stop, it was time to board the Devon Sea Safari boat with skipper Rob Hughes. Rob's knowledge of the town and finding birds and wildlife, combined with the comfortable fast rib, was a great combination. Very soon after leaving Teignmouth, the boat was tracking common dolphins and Manx shearwaters. Other scarcer birds seen were the globally threatened Balearic shearwaters (over 80 seen, including a flock of 40+), kittiwake, fulmar, gannets, guillemots, razorbill and Mediterranean gulls. Searching for some reported Risso's dolphins drew a blank, but did help to locate some harbour porpoises. On the islands, there were good comparative views of shags and cormorants, plus a probable, very early migrant purple sandpiper.

All too soon, it was time to head back to the quay, but not before stopping for hauled-out grey seals and several peregrine falcons. A wonderful trip was enjoyed by everyone.

Fruit and hot pasties collected in town - next stop was RSPB Labrador Bay's 'cirl bunting' reserve. While tucking into our picnic lunch, a marbled white butterfly shot past, and two or three cirl buntings could be heard singing. Lunch finished, we searched the hedgerows and fields and found five or more cirl buntings, including juveniles and a couple of adult males.

The afternoon excursion to Aylesbeare Common was good, the hoped-for Dartford warblers were seen, amongst other species such as linnets, yellowhammer and stonechats. We also saw a spectacular low flypast of a silver Spitfire aircraft! The hot sunny afternoon meant plenty of butterflies were on the wing. Grayling were numerous, as were large and small skippers, small heath, silver-studded blues and a single wall. Toward the woodland edge, wood ants were busy crossing the sandy paths.

The evening beaver watch was much more successful, with a minimum of four being seen, including two busy grooming together. A loud squeak heard from the river was an otter call, but it didn't show itself. Returning to the minibus, a nightjar flew over the car park - a very unusual sighting away from the higher nearby heathlands!

**Thursday 10 July 2025**

**Day 4:**

Aish Tor Dartmoor

*Hot, calm and sunny*

A slightly later start to the morning allowed for packing and checking out. First stop was Ashburton to collect our picnic lunches from the local delicatessen, then we headed on up to Aish Tor. Within minutes of leaving

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the minibus, walking down to the bracken-covered hillside, many butterflies were flitting all around the group, including a couple of brimstones and a brief view of a fritillary species. Searching the flowering bramble amongst the bracken, it wasn't long before our first, and as it turned out, only confirmed sighting of a high brown fritillary. It showed well, displaying both upper and underwing for the whole group to see. Other butterflies in the same area were silver-washed fritillary, small copper, small heath and many browns! It was already getting hot, so a drive down the hill to New Bridge and a walk along the river and into the woodland afforded shelter from the sun and some great sightings too. Several more silver-washed fritillaries, calling marsh coal, blue and great tits, treecreeper and a grey wagtail. It was, however, a territorial white admiral that stole the show for the group. Our last picnic of the tour was enjoyed by the river below New Bridge, hoping a dipper might fly past. Instead, a juvenile dipper spent the whole of our picnic break bobbing on rocks and swimming in the River Dart through the stone bridge arches.

A lovely way to relax and finish a wildlife-filled tour with fantastic weather.

Final drop off and goodbyes back at the Woodbury Park Hotel, and then on to Exeter St. David's railway station.

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# Checklist for Wild Devon in Summer



	Common Name	Scientific Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
	<b>BIRDS</b>					
1	Canada goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		✓		
2	Greylag goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		✓		
3	Mute swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓			
4	Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	✓			
5	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓			
6	Eurasian wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>	✓			
7	Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓			
8	Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>	✓			
9	Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>			✓	
10	Manx shearwater	<i>Puffinus puffinus</i>			✓	
11	Balearic shearwater	<i>Puffinus mauretanicus</i>			✓	
12	Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	✓			
13	Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓		
14	Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓			
15	Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>			✓	
16	European shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>			✓	
17	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓		✓	
18	Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		✓		
19	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>		✓		
20	Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
21	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		✓	✓	
22	Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓			
23	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓			
24	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>			H	
25	Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	✓		✓	
26	Black-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	✓			

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27	Purple sandpiper	<i>Calidris maritima</i>			✓	
28	Green sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	✓	✓		
29	Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	✓		✓	
30	Spotted redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	✓			
31	Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>			✓	
32	Black-headed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓		✓	
33	Mediterranean gull	<i>Ichthyaetus melanocephalus</i>	✓		✓	
34	Great black-backed gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>			✓	
35	Herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	
36	Common guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>			✓	
37	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>			✓	
38	Rock dove / feral pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>			✓	
39	Stock dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>			✓	
40	Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>			✓	
41	Collared dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		✓		
42	Tawny owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	✓			
43	Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>		✓	✓	
44	Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
45	Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	✓			
46	Great spotted woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		✓		
47	Green woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		✓		
48	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>			✓	
49	Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			✓	
50	Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		✓		
51	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
52	Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
53	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓		✓	
54	Carrion crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
55	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		H		
56	Coal tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>		✓	H	H
57	Marsh tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>				H
58	Blue tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
59	Great tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓		✓
60	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		✓	✓	✓

61	Sand martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	✓			
62	Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
63	House martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓		
64	Long-tailed tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		✓		✓
65	Willow warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		✓		✓
66	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓		✓
67	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	H	H	✓	H
68	Dartford warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>			✓	
69	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>				H
70	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓		
71	Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		H		H
72	Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		H		
73	Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		✓	✓	✓
74	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
75	Song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	H	✓	H	
76	Mistle thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		✓		
77	Spotted flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>		✓		
78	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓		✓
79	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>		✓		
80	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓	✓	
81	Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		✓		
82	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓		✓
83	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓		✓
84	Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>				✓
85	Grey wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>				H
86	Pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	
87	Meadow pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓		
88	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓		✓
89	Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		✓		✓
90	Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	H	✓	✓	✓
91	Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	H	✓	✓	✓
92	Lesser redpoll	<i>Acanthis cabaret</i>				H
93	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
94	Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		✓	✓	

95	Cirl bunting	<i>Emberiza cirius</i>			✓	
96	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>			✓	
97	Reed bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>		✓		
	<b>MAMMALS</b>					
1	Eurasian beaver	<i>Castor fiber</i>		✓	✓	
2	Eurasian otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>			H	
3	Roe deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>		✓		
4	European rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓			
5	Grey squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>				✓
6	Grey seal	<i>Halichoerus grypus</i>			✓	
7	Short-beaked common dolphin	<i>Delphinus delphis</i>			✓	
8	Harbour porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>			✓	
9	Pipistrelle bat sp.	<i>Pipistrellus sp.</i>		✓		
	<b>BUTTERFLIES</b>					
1	Small skipper	<i>Thymelicus sylvestris</i>			✓	
2	Large skipper	<i>Ochlodes sylvanus</i>			✓	
3	( Swallowtail )	<i>Papilio machaon</i>		✓		
4	Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>			✓	✓
5	Large white	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Small white	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
7	Green-veined white	<i>Pieris napi</i>	✓			
8	Small copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeus</i>		✓		✓
9	Common blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>	✓		✓	
10	Silver-studded blue	<i>Plebejus argus</i>			✓	
11	Holly blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>	✓			✓
12	White admiral	<i>Limenitis camilla</i>				✓
13	Red admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
14	Peacock	<i>Aglais io</i>		✓	✓	✓
15	Comma	<i>Polygonia c-album</i>	✓		✓	✓
16	Dark green fritillary	<i>Argynnis aglaja</i>		✓		
17	Silver-washed fritillary	<i>Argynnis paphia</i>	✓			✓
18	High brown fritillary	<i>Fabriciana adippe</i>				✓

19	Speckled wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>	✓		✓	✓
20	Wall	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>			✓	
21	Marbled white	<i>Melanargia galathea</i>			✓	
22	Grayling	<i>Hipparchia semele</i>			✓	
23	Gatekeeper	<i>Pyronia tithonus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
24	Meadow brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
25	Ringlet	<i>Aphantopus hyperantus</i>		✓	✓	✓
26	Small heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>			✓	✓
	<b>DRAGONFLIES &amp; DAMSELFLIES</b>					
1	Azure damselfly	<i>Coenagrion puella</i>		✓		
2	Southern hawker	<i>Aeshna cyanea</i>	✓	✓		
3	Emperor dragonfly	<i>Anax imperator</i>		✓	✓	
4	Broad-Bodied chaser	<i>Libellula depressa</i>		✓		
5	Keeled skimmer	<i>Orthetrum coerulescens</i>		✓		
6	Common darter	<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>			✓	
	<b>AMPHIBIANAS</b>					
1	(Marsh frog)	<i>Pelophylax ridibundus</i>		H		