

Conservation Communities - Wildlife Spotters Challenge

May and June

We'd love to hear from you if you've seen any of these 8 species. Help us to build up a picture of Devon's wildlife by telling Devon Biodiversity Records Centre what you've seen and where: [Wildlife sightings – DBRC](#)



Photo: Tom Marshall

English Bluebells

English bluebells are more delicate than the non-native variety, with tightly curled back petals and flowers all on one side of the stem.

Wildflowers

Find out how to distinguish these species from other similar plants, along with more woodland wildflowers you can record by watching our [woodland talk](#).



Photo: Jess Smallcombe

Early Purple Orchids

These look nicer than they smell! Found until June in woodlands and road verges, with purple flowers and spotted leaves.

Herring Gulls are large, with yellow beak and pink legs. The beak has a red spot. Their front and tail are white and the back and wings are grey, with black and white bars across the tips. They come inland and can be found around farmland, reservoirs and rubbish tips! Young gulls are a mottled brown colour.



Photo: Bob Coyle

Birds

Did you know that some species we think of as common are actually declining?



Photo: Shirley Freeman

House Sparrows tend to form flocks. Males and females look different. The males have a grey top of the head, with a black bar across each eye, turning brown at the back of the head. Their tummy is pale with a black bib under their chin. Females are a similar colour in the body (brown back and wings and pale front) but don't have the striking markings on the head, just a rather subtle brown eye stripe.

Both house sparrows and herring gulls are on the [Birds Of Conservation Concern, red list](#)

Reptiles

In spring and early summer reptiles can be seen basking in the early morning sun. We'd like to hear about any reptiles you see.

Grass Snakes are often seen in gardens and near water. They are usually an olive colour with black bars, but colour is variable. They have a creamy-white collar just behind the head. Young grass snakes don't hatch until late summer.

Photo: David Chamberlain



Mammals

Here are a couple of mammal species that are often seen, but not so often recorded. Both species are covered in our [Meadow Mammals Talk](#).



Rabbits

Rabbits can be seen all year round. Their network of warrens can be hidden in scrub but are often visible. They will graze grassland around their warrens, leaving closely cropped lawns.



Moles

It is unlikely that you will see a mole but their molehills are unmistakable evidence of their presence. Molehills will appear in spring until June, when the ground often becomes too hard. Send us in your records of molehills.

Amphibians

We'd like to hear about any amphibians you see, there are very few records of amphibians in the Conservation Communities Project area. To learn more about amphibians and how to identify them watch our [Amphibians Talk](#).



Palmate Newts are common across Devon. At this time of year they are breeding in ponds. Palmate newts grow to about 9cm long. The males are easiest to identify. Breeding males have large hind feet (almost like they are wearing gloves) and have a filament at the end of their tail. For both sexes, their throat underneath is unpigmented and has no spots (unlike a smooth newt, which has a spotty throat).



Conservation Communities is a project working with 11 parishes between Great Torrington and Hatherleigh to record as much about the natural environment as possible. Currently, little is known about which species live here and even fewer sightings have been formally recorded with [Devon Biodiversity Records Centre \(DBRC\)](#), this makes it very difficult to assess how the local wildlife is doing, and makes it even harder to protect it.

Conservation Communities - Wildlife Spotters Challenge

July, August and September

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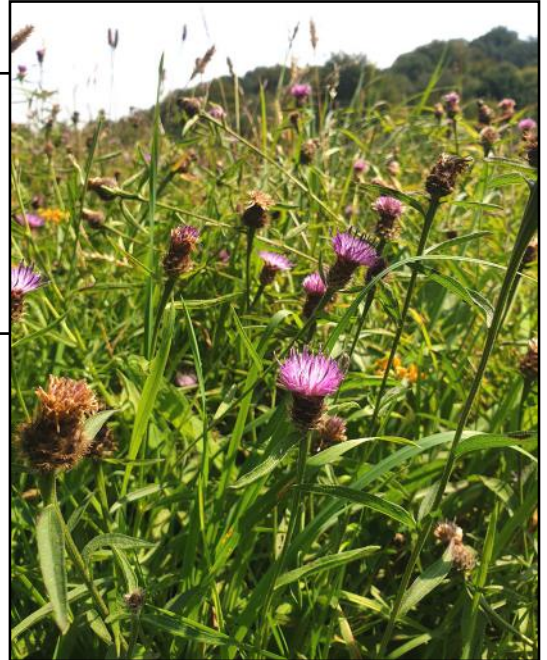
Devon Biodiversity Records Centre what you've seen and where:

[Wildlife sightings – DBRC](#)



Wildflowers

Black knapweed is great for insects and, along with some other key plant species can be an indicator of good habitat quality in meadows. Knapweed flowers have a thistle-like appearance. They are pink/purple and have a round bract underneath. Black knapweed has simple leaves and the flowers are 15-20mm across.



Birds

Swallows, Swifts and House Martins

All these species are summer visitors to the UK, spending the winters in Africa. They are all dynamic and agile fliers, with sharp wings and forked tails.

Here's how to tell them apart:

Photo: Chris Gomersall



Swallows have dark, glossy backs, pale underparts with a red chin. They have long, fine tail feathers. Swallows build cup-shaped nests in barns. They will often perch on phone wires.



Photo: Stefan Johansson

Swifts are large, with a wingspan up to 48cm. They are dark brown, apart from a white patch on their throat. The tail isn't as forked as a swallow's. You can hear their screaming calls in the mornings and evenings as they catch prey high in the sky. They don't build exposed nests and don't perch – they have tiny legs and feet!

Photo: Margaret Holland



House martins are the smallest of these three species, measuring up to a 29cm wingspan. They have glossy blue-black backs and white underparts, including their throats. They also have a white patch at the base of the tail. Their tails are the least forked. House martins build mud-cup nests on the outside of buildings, often in groups.

Reptiles

We'd like to hear about any reptiles you see.

Slow worms are lizards who have lost their legs through evolution. They are our most common reptile and frequent garden or allotment habitants. Slow worms give birth to live young, which are a golden colour. Females have dark flanks and mature males can be silver with blue tummies! They are fantastic guests to gardens as they will eat pests.



Photo: Bruce Shortland

Mammals

Here are a couple of mammal species that are often seen, but not so often recorded. To find out more about these species watch our talks: [Hedgehogs](#) and [Bats](#).



Photo: Hugh Clark

Bats have their babies in June and July. For a few weeks, mother bats carry their young when they leave the roost at night. In August, when the young get too big to carry, adult bats come and go

from a roost as they keep check on their pups. We have 16 bat species in Devon. Bats appear just after sunset, hunting for insects. A pipistrelle bat (one of our smallest species) can eat thousands of midges in a night! If you see a bat, but don't know the species, you can still record it as "bat" with DBRC.

The photo shows a brown long-eared bat.



Photo: David Kilby

Hedgehogs are out and about at this time of year. You might hear their load snuffling in the evenings. Or find their droppings in the garden. Hedgehog droppings are usually very dark brown to black with evidence of partially-digested insect remains. They are sausage-shaped and can vary in length from 1.5 cm to 5cm.



Photo: Adam Rhodes

Amphibians

We'd like to hear about any amphibians you see. To learn more about amphibians and how to identify them watch our [Amphibians Talk](#).

Common frogs are often seen in spring, but are harder to spot in summer. Look in garden ponds and along water ways. Their colour is variable, but there is a dark patch just behind the eye and stripey legs.

Autumn — Hedgerows

Help us to build up a picture of Devon's wildlife by telling Devon Biodiversity Records Centre (www.dbrc.org.uk) what you have seen and where.

With an abundance of fruit and nuts in autumn, hedgerows are where many species gather to feed and fatten up before winter. Particularly hibernating species, like hedgehogs and dormice.

Places to look for wildlife— Take a close look and see what you can find.

Blackberries are one of the most abundant fruits. These provide food for a huge number of species, including mammals, birds and insects.



Amy Lewis

Ivy flowers through autumn provide a much-needed nectar source. Mature plants produce greenish-yellow flowers. You can spot late-flying butterflies, such as the comma on this ivy.



Amy Lewis

Hazelnuts are an important source of energy for lots of small mammals. Take a close look at them and see if you can find any that have been nibbled.



Dormouse

- Smooth inner rim of hole
- Tooth marks on surface of nut at angles in a spiral around the hole



Wood mouse

- Parallel tooth marks on inner rim of hole
- Rough tooth marks around outer rim of hole



Bank vole

- Parallel tooth marks on inner rim of hole
- No tooth marks on surface of nut



Squirrel

- Smooth - no tooth marks
- Cracks nutshells open cleanly



Woodpecker and nuthatch

- Wedge nuts into crevices
- Cracks nutshells open by hammering with beak

Insects

Angle shades: This distinctive moth is often visible in the daytime. It uses camouflage to hide, resting with its wings folded along its body, resembling a dry leaf. Adults can be seen in early autumn. This species overwinters in the ground as a caterpillar.



John Bridges



Galls: Fallen leaves give a great opportunity to look closely at some of the galls that can be found, like these spangle galls, caused by a gall wasp. Galls most commonly form due to insects, forcing the tree to produce a growth for the benefit of the insect. Gall wasps are a common culprit, and there are many different species. They cause other commonly spotted galls like oak marble galls and robin's pin-cushions.

Birds

Redwings gather in large groups in autumn. They migrate to Britain in October and spend the winter here, initially feeding on abundant berries. Redwings spend most of the time in hedgerows, only visiting gardens in extreme weather. A small member of the Thrush family, they have a striking red colour to their underwing and a distinctive cream-coloured stripe above the eye.

Fieldfares are another, larger, member of the Thrush family. They also overwinter in Britain, often in large flocks. Often seen along hawthorn hedges, feeding on the berries. Again, they rarely visit gardens unless snowy weather covers their preferred habitat.



Adam Jones



Richard Steel/2020/Vision

To find out more about these topics, and others, watch the Conservation Communities Project online talks at www.devonwildlifetrust.org.

Topics include; Hedgehogs, Tracks and Signs, Winter Twig ID, Managing Devon Hedges for Wildlife.