

# Exmoor in Spring

## Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

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### Outline itinerary

**Day 1** Arrive Exmoor

**Day 2/3** Excursions around Exmoor

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### Departs

April, May or June

### Dates and Prices

See website (tour code GBR206)

### Grading

A/B. Easy to moderate day walks.

### Focus

Birds and general natural history

### Highlights

- Fantastic Exmoor scenery
- Spring migrants including Redstart, Pied Flycatcher & Wood Warbler
- Possibility of Merlin & Hen Harrier
- Variety of spring butterflies
- Exmoor Ponies & Red Deer
- Moorland birds such as Whinchat, Stonechat, Redpoll, Linnet & Cuckoo
- Possibility of evening excursions for Tawny Owl & Nightjar
- Extend the weekend to spend time in historic Bridgwater or Taunton



Images from top: Lesser Redpoll, Whinchat & Common Cuckoo  
(Images by Oliver Smart)



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## Introduction

Exmoor, lying on the border between Devon and Somerset, and named for the river that runs through it, is a distinctive landscape of moors, valleys, woods and agriculture that has been shaped by both natural forces and people over many years. There is evidence of cultivation here dating back to the Mesolithic times, shaping the area and eventually culminating in the landscapes of Exmoor that we know today.



Exmoor

The Devonian geology has led to the hills being flat topped and smooth, often in long ridges that follow the alignment of the underlying, sedimentary rock. Unusually high for the south of England, it is an unglaciated region. The features of this high plateau are older than the Alps and some think among the oldest on earth.

The wildness, beauty and peacefulness of the moors was one of the main reasons for its National Park status, covering 267 square miles of countryside. The climate here is milder, although wetter, than other parts of the country and this creates a longer growing season, allowing certain species



Common Redstart

of plant and animal to thrive here. A mix of grass and heather moorland make up just over a quarter of the area. It's home to Exmoor Ponies, a native British breed that is one of the oldest known breeds and rarer than the Giant Panda. Spring is an excellent time to visit when migrant birds, including warblers and flycatchers, return to swell the song of our resident species, nesting is in full swing and young mammals emerge into the world. Among the birds that we hope to find this weekend are Cuckoo, Dipper, Pied Flycatcher, Wood Warbler, Whitethroat, Redstart, Whinchat, Redpoll, Tree Pipit, Nightjar, Merlin and Hen Harrier.

Our tour starts on the Friday evening and we'll spend the next 48 hours exploring a selection of sights around Exmoor, including Horner Wood, Halse Combe and Dunkery Beacon.

## Itinerary

*Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.*

## Day 1

## Arrive Exmoor

This weekend starts and ends at Bridgwater Station to allowing rail travellers to arrive in comfort via main line routes, and it is also possible to travel directly to the accommodation if travelling by car. We will meet at Bridgwater Railway Station at approximately 1600 hours (timing to be confirmed in the final joining instructions).

The programme for this evening and the next two days will be kept flexible, in order to make best



Tawny Owl

use of the prevailing weather conditions and to maximise our chances of seeing key species. Our time will be divided between ancient woodlands, combes and moorland. However, the whole area is good for wildlife and there will be many opportunities to stop as we drive between sites. Our tour leader knows the area extremely well and will make decisions on the day as to exactly where we will go. This afternoon, we may stop at some local sites on the way to our hotel and, weather permitting, will aim to head out in the evening for nocturnal species such as owls and nightjars.

## Days 2 – 3

The main areas we are likely to visit are described below:

### Horner Wood

This ancient oak woodland is one of the largest in Britain and many consider it to be the most beautiful. Part of the Holnicote Estate, the lands were donated to the National Trust for preservation and the enjoyment of everyone. There have been woods on this site since at least 1600AD, although it is likely to be far older. It is a key site for some mosses, lichens, ferns and liverworts, with over 200 of these found here and some are particularly rare. A number of the oaks were pollarded and are very old, perhaps up to 500 years old, providing cavities for birds and bats. At this time of year the woodland floor may be carpeted with



Horner Wood

Bluebells, which are always wonderful to see. As we stroll beneath the canopy and among the gnarled branches, surrounded by birdsong, we will be looking for such species as Pied Flycatcher, Redstart, Wood Warbler, Tree Pipit, Marsh Tit, Mistle Thrush, Bullfinch and Willow Warbler, keeping



an ear out for calling Cuckoo. Along the Horner Water, which runs through the woods, we will watch for Grey Wagtail and Dipper.

## Halse Combe



Heath Fritillary

Since 1996, Halse Combe has been a test site for land management practices designed to encourage the recovery of the Heath Fritillary population. The mix of gorse, bracken, bilberry and cow-wheat provide the right conditions for this rare butterfly and we will watch out for them if conditions are right. Atop the gorge we may find a Dartford Warbler or two, as well as Whinchat, Stonechat or pairs of Linnet.

## Dunkery Beacon

Dunkery Beacon is the highest point of Exmoor, at 519m (1,705ft), and on a clear day offers up wonderful vistas across the moors to Dartmoor in the south and north to the Bristol Channel and Wales. It consists of a series of small summits topped with Bronze Age barrows. It's an ideal point to watch out for ponies, Brown Hare and Red Deer grazing the moorland slopes. Indeed, the largest British herd of Red Deer are found here. We may also be fortunate enough to spot hunting Merlin. Around this area we'll keep an eye out for Redpoll, Cuckoo, Wheatear, Green Woodpecker and Meadow Pipit.



Merlin

After an action-packed weekend of wildlife watching, the tour will conclude at Bridgwater Railway Station by approximately 1600 hours.

You may like to consider extending your stay, and we would be happy to assist you with this.

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Images courtesy of Oliver Smart ([www.smartimages.co.uk](http://www.smartimages.co.uk))

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## Tour Grading

A/B. There will be some easy to moderate walking on this holiday, covering several miles per day. However, this will be at a slow pace, mainly on good, paths, however it may be steep or rough in places.

This tour is suitable for birdwatchers and naturalists of all abilities.

## Accommodation & Food

The holiday cost includes accommodation, half board (breakfast and evening meals) plus guiding and transport.

Breakfasts and evening meals are included beginning with the evening meal on Day 1 and finishing with breakfast on Day 3. Lunches are not included. Accommodation will be in en-suite twin or double rooms in a comfortable hotel or inn, but a limited number of single rooms will also be available.

We will stop for lunch and comfort breaks on both days. You will need to bring any snacks or drinks that you want during the rest of the day with you as these are not provided.

## Weather

Although Exmoor enjoys a milder climate than many parts of Britain, it can still be a little chilly in the spring, particularly in the evenings, and in these exposed habitats the wind chill can make it seem even colder. Rain is possible, but we will hope for more settled weather during our visit.

## Clothing & Equipment

Warm and waterproof clothing and footwear are essential. Waterproof jacket and trousers should be brought with you. Several thinner layers, as opposed to one thick layer, are the best way to keep warm, and can be removed if the temperature increases. Hat, scarf and gloves are also essential!

We would recommend that all tour participants bring a pair of binoculars with them. A scope can be useful for sessions on more open areas, however, if you don't have your own, your tour leader will have one. A day pack for carrying items and a re-fillable water bottle should be brought with you. A thermos flask and torch would be useful items to have. Sunglasses and a chap-stick may also be useful.

If you are bringing a camera with you, please ensure that you have a waterproof bag or case to put it in or a weather cover. We would recommend bringing spare batteries as cold weather can reduce the performance and mean that your batteries don't last very long.

## Inclusions / Exclusions

The following costs are included in the price of the holiday:

- Accommodation in a comfortable hotel on DBB basis
- Transport from Bridgwater
- All guiding
- All costs associated with visiting locations mentioned in itinerary.

The following costs are **not** included and should be budgeted for:

- Lunches
- Drinks
- Any other personal spending e.g. souvenirs, discretionary tipping, etc.

## How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk), or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests, at the time of booking.

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