

South Devon Day Trip

10th October 2026

Leader Adam Davison, Skipper Alan Hemsley on the African Queen with 8 Naturetrek clients

The group gathered at the National Trust car park at Man sands at 9am and geared up for mixed weather conditions albeit mild. The first few birds we heard clearly identified the season with migrating birds in the hedgerows and flying overhead. Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs called and bird activity was high. The hedgerow bordering the ancient, cobbled smugglers lane down to the sea held as many as five calling and singing Firecrests. A Goldcrest high in the pines provided a great opportunity to compare their similar calls and plumages.

Overlooking the valley and viewing the recent habitat management activity we heard the cries of young Common Buzzards in the distance.

The wetland and lake area held Mallard, three Gadwall and Teal and a Heron. A Water Rail squealed from the depths of the phragmites reed bed and Cettis Warblers occasionally sang brief snatches of the distinctive song. A few Stonechats flitted around briars and boldly perching on taller vegetation.

It was just before midday when we ate our lunches in the car park and headed off on the two-mile journey to Kingswear Marina to meet Alan, the Skipper of the African Queen. Leaving promptly at 1300 hrs we were given the health and safety aboard rundown and headed out to the River Mouth. Heading out to a small beach to view a month-old Atlantic Grey Seal pup that the skipper had been keeping an eye on in recent days. Close to the Mewstone and East Blackrocks we acquainted ourselves with Cormorants and Shags all sat on the guano covered islands. From the boat we watched family parties of Atlantic Grey seals hauled out on the kelp covered lower rocks, watched a lone turnstone and headed back towards Dartmouth.

In the clear blue skies above us a female Sparrowhawk showed well soaring above the boat and as many as four Buzzards wheeled around the wooded headland

Adam, the leader called 'That's an interesting raptor!' and gave directions to the group. Everyone saw the bird and watched it noting its size, tail length, pale belly and broad wings. It was clearly a Goshawk and throughout the afternoon we were allowed comparisons with numerous Common Buzzards and a male sparrowhawk clearly displaying the differences between the species and confirming the sighting.

The skipper took us to areas that kingfishers had recently been seen –we had about ten sightings of viewed them perched out in the open on the end of fallen logs, chasing and calling to each other and at one stage three birds together.

Common seals also known as Harbour Seals were loafing on a pontoon and Atlantic Grey Seals were ‘bottling’ in the deeper river channels. Another very young seal pup had hauled out onto the mud and was photographed to identify it for the seal Project

The riverbank near to the Sharpham Estate was showing vibrant Autumn woodland colours echoed by a roosting flock of eleven Mandarin duck

South Devon’s amazing wildlife and scenery had made it another memorable day. The day ended with more Swallows flying high over the hills making it a very fitting end to the Summer in the Southwest.

Common name	Scientific name
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>
Manderin duck	<i>Aix galericulata</i>
Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>
Feral Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia 'domestica'</i>
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>
Eurasian curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>
Common redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
European Shag	<i>Gulosus aristotelis</i>
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>
Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>
House Martin	<i>delchion urbicum</i>
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>

Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>
Song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>
Grey wagtail	<i>Montacilla cinerea</i>
Sky lark	<i>Alauda avensis</i>
European Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>
Meadow pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>