

# Exmoor in Spring

Naturetrek Tour Report

27th – 29th May 2022



Great Prominent



Green Hairstreak



Tarr Steps



Webber's Post

Tour report & images by Oliver Smart



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Tour participants: Oliver Smart (Leader) with four Naturetrek clients

## Summary

Spring on Exmoor is just the epitome of the time of year, with woodlands filled with migrants, moorland covered in wildflowers and fresh growth and streams bubbling after winter rains. There is so much to be seen in this region covering coast, heath, broadleaved ancient woodland, moors with high vantage points and of course quaint villages and stunning wildlife. This two-night trip captures a breath-taking introduction to the national park and some hidden gems it has in store.

### Day 1

Friday 27th May

After meeting three quarters of the group at Bridgwater Railway Station, we headed to the Tarr Farm Inn, our accommodation for the duration of our stay within Exmoor National Park. On arrival we met our hosts and the final client, and proceeded to dinner, enjoying a fabulous three-course meal with beautifully prepared and presented food. This was certainly a fantastic start to the tour and was a key part of our enjoyment too!

Following our fine feast, we headed to the northern area of the park beyond Dunkery Beacon where we looked and listened for nocturnal wildlife. We were soon rewarded with lovely churring calls of Nightjar, having just returned from their African wintering grounds. Alongside this classic two noted churr, we also picked up the frog-like *kerruit* call as a male with white tail feather edges flew passed our viewpoint. Stunning! We were also listening to the duets of Tawny Owls with two pairs clearly discernible from our position; with one pair in the valley below and the other within 100m of us in the mixed forest on higher ground.

We relocated to another spot and picked up the churring of two more Nightjars, before we headed back to the hotel for a well-earned rest.

### Day 2

Saturday 28th May

A late night and rather early alarm call at 5am got us started as we headed to Horner Wood, a stunning National Trust site in the heart of Exmoor. We followed a circular route, taking in river, woodland glades and wonderful panoramas of ancient oak trees and a carpet of bilberry and wildflowers. The sun was out and skies were clear and blue. The temperature started off at just four degrees but warmed quickly to mid-teens by the afternoon.

A pair of feeding Grey Wagtail were seen soon after leaving the car park and Dipper a short distance along the main ride. Garden Warbler and Blackcap sang and briefly showed themselves, giving a good comparison to their often-confusing songs. Coal and Marsh Tit, Chaffinch, Wren, Song Thrush, Blackbird and Robin sung or called too adding to the cacophony of spring bird song. Great Spotted Woodpeckers called and drummed briefly with a nest site with very vocal youngsters located later.

We were here though for some real gems of western deciduous oak woodland and we were not disappointed. Pied Flycatchers appeared or were heard singing in a number of spots throughout the forest. Redstart too were seen briefly and Wood Warbler called but failed to show on this occasion. Siskin flew overhead and commoner

birds could be seen or heard. Bilberry carpeted the woodland floor and oak trees twisted and craned towards the sky.

Back at the hotel we enjoyed our first breakfast, something definitely worth waiting for. Tarr Steps are medieval in origin and we wanted to explore the valley along the River Barle. The woodland was alive with migrant warblers, Redstart and a Spotted Flycatcher perched high in the canopy. Beautiful Demoiselles bounced over the river and young Brown Trout held their positions facing upstream.

After our lunchtime walk, we enjoyed a cream tea at the hotel, before heading to Chetsford Water. Scanning and wandering the moorland we picked up our best views of Cuckoo, Dipper, several Whinchat and Redstart, both male and females posing nicely.

Dinner was a delicious affair with a fantastic selection of meals and beautifully presented once more.

After dinner a few of the group fancied one final walk, so after setting up a moth trap, we headed to the river to see if any bats were present. Using a modern iPhone connecting gadget called an Echo Meter, we were able to record Soprano and Common Pipistrelles and later a Daubenton's Bat, with a much lower frequency. Tawny Owl hooted in the background and on our return walk we spotted a Common Toad crossing the track.

## Day 3

## Sunday 29th May

Our final morning, and we ventured into the hotel garden and processed the moth trap that was set overnight. The sun was up and warming the patio area. A few moths were roosting around the trap so we identified these first before checking the inside of the trap. House Martins swooped in overhead to their nests under the eaves of the hotel and a Pied Wagtail was feeding young in a well-hidden nest behind a wall of ivy. Great Prominent, Engrailed, White Ermine and Peppered Moth were on the walls. Inside the trap a nice selection of moths was present including Dark Brocade, Clouded-bordered Brindle, Iron Prominent, Pale Tussock, Small Phoenix, Scalloped Hazel and Coxcomb Prominent. The names really are magic! The highlight though were three Poplar Hawkmoths, a total hit with the group! Everyone took photographs and thoroughly enjoyed the session, a first for most of them. A Cockchafer was also worthy of finding under one of the egg boxes.

Following breakfast and checking out, we headed to Dunkery and traversed the hillside for our main walk of the day. Common Tiger and Dor Beetles scuttled or plodded along the tracks and Small Heath butterflies flitted up from their basking spots. Birds sang from various perches including Tree Pipit, showing off their parachuting display. Small gullies brought Redstart, Willow Warbler, Cuckoo, Pied Flycatcher and glorious views across the moors. As we dropped down the valley on the circular route a Wood Warbler could be heard. After a careful approach we spotted this bright white and yellow bird singing from birch trees, a complete haul of the specialities of this wonderful park.

Our final lunch at Horner Tea Rooms ended our wonderful short stay on Exmoor. Our final farewell was back in Bridgwater as we went our separate ways, with fitting memories of a delightful short stay in north-western Somerset.

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## Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

	I = Introduced H = heard only		May 2022		
	Common name	Scientific name	27	28	29
1	Common Pheasant - I	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓	✓
2	European Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>	✓		
3	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	✓	✓	✓
4	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>		✓	
5	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		H	H
6	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓
7	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓		
8	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>		✓	
9	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		✓	
10	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓		
11	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓
12	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	H		
13	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		✓	✓
14	European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		H	H
15	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		✓	
16	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		✓	
17	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		✓	✓
18	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>		✓	✓
19	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>		✓	✓
20	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		✓	✓
21	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓
22	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		✓	
23	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>		H	
24	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓
25	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	
26	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		✓	H

	I = Introduced H = heard only		May 2022		
	Common name	Scientific name	27	28	29
27	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		✓	✓
28	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		✓	✓
29	Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>		✓	✓
30	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		✓	✓
31	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		✓	H
32	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		✓	✓
33	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>		✓	
34	Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>			H
35	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		✓	✓
36	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		✓	✓
37	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		✓	
38	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		✓	✓
39	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		✓	
40	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓
41	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>		✓	
42	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓	✓
43	European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>		✓	H
44	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>		✓	H
45	Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>		✓	
46	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓	H
47	White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>		✓	
48	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓
49	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	H	✓
50	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		✓	
51	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓
52	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	✓
53	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>			✓
54	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓
55	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		✓	
56	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓	✓
57	Lesser Redpoll	<i>Acanthis cabaret</i>		H	✓
58	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓
59	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		✓	✓
60	Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>		✓	

## Others

I = Introduced		May 2022		
Common name	Scientific name	27	28	29
<b>Reptiles &amp; Amphibians</b>				
Common Lizard	<i>Zootoca vivipara</i>		✓	
Common Toad	<i>Bufo bufo</i>		✓	
<b>Mammals</b>				
Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>		✓	
European Rabbit - I	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		✓	
Brown Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>		✓	
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>		✓	✓

I = Introduced		May 2022		
Common name	Scientific name	27	28	29
<b>Butterflies</b>				
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>		✓	✓
Green-veined White	<i>Pieris napi</i>		✓	✓
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>		✓	✓
Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>		✓	✓
Green Hairstreak	<i>Callophrys rubi</i>			✓
<b>Moths</b>				
Light Emerald	<i>Campaea margaritata</i>		✓	
Common Heath	<i>Ematurga atomaria</i>		✓	✓
Scalloped Hazel	<i>Odontopera bidentata</i>	✓		✓
White Ermine	<i>Spilosoma lubricipeda</i>			✓
Buff-tip	<i>Phalera bucephala</i>			✓
Great Prominent	<i>Peridea anceps</i>			✓
Clouded Border	<i>Lomaspilis marginata</i>			✓
Pale Tussock	<i>Calliteara pudibunda</i>			✓
Small Phoenix	<i>Ecliptopera silaceata</i>			✓
Flame Shoulder	<i>Ochroleuca plecta</i>			✓
Dark Brocade	<i>Mniotype adusta</i>			✓
Coxcomb Prominent	<i>Ptilodon capucina</i>			✓
Iron Prominent	<i>Notodonta dromedarius</i>			✓
Knot Grass	<i>Acronicta rumicis</i>			✓
Poplar Hawkmoth	<i>Laothoe populi</i>			✓
Treble Lines	<i>Charanyca trigrammica</i>			✓
Turnip	<i>Agrotis segetum</i>			✓
Engrailed	<i>Ectropis crepuscularia</i>			✓
Clouded-bordered Brindle	<i>Apamea crenata</i>			✓
Peppered Moth	<i>Biston betularia</i>			✓
Drinker	<i>Euthrix potatoria</i>			✓
	<i>Crambus lathionellus</i>			✓
	<i>Nematopogon schwarziellus</i>			✓
<b>Dragonflies</b>				
Beautiful Demoiselle	<i>Calopteryx virgo</i>		✓	
<b>Fish</b>				
Brown Trout	<i>Salmo trutta</i>		✓	
<b>Other insects</b>				
Dor Beetle	<i>Geotrupes stercorarius</i>		✓	✓
Green Tiger Beetle	<i>Cicindela campestris</i>		✓	✓
St. Mark's Fly	<i>Bibio marci</i>		✓	✓
Hornet	<i>Vespa crabro</i>			✓
Cockchafer	<i>Melolontha melolontha</i>			✓
<b>Arachnids</b>				
Nursery-web Spider	<i>Pisaura mirabilis</i>			✓