

Exmoor in Spring

Naturetrek Tour Report

26th – 29th May 2026



Ctenicera cuprea



Chetsford Water with mammatus clouds



Green Hairstreak



Privet Hawkmoth

Tour report by Oliver Smart



Naturetrek

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Tour participants: Oliver Smart (leader) with seven Naturetrek clients

Summary

Covering an area of 692.8 km², Exmoor National Park is split between Somerset and Devon. We visited the eastern part of this beautiful area and, based in Exford, we explored sites close to the hotel. The tour focused on spring birds, and we saw many of the migrant species we had hoped for in the woods, heathland and moorland. We also ran a moth trap, listened out for some nocturnal wildlife, and enjoyed stunning walks with magnificent views. Some of the highlights of the tour included Nightjar, Pied Flycatcher, Whinchat, Cuckoo, Dipper, various moths, Green Hairstreak and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary.

Day 1

Tuesday 26th May

Arrival

Very hot and sunny, with a light breeze, 36°C on arrival (dropping to 22°C for our walk)

With just one member of the group requiring pick-up from Bridgwater Railway Station, it would seem to have been a straightforward arrival at The Crown Inn in Exford. Unfortunately, with a catalogue of railway cancellations, delays and a touch of poor communication from railway staff, the sole client making the short journey was stuck in Bristol Temple Meads. Our leader, already in Bridgwater, made the quick decision to complete the round-trip to collect the client, and all were united fifteen minutes before dinner on the first evening! We had a quick briefing before enjoying a superb two-course meal. Three courses were on offer, but knowing how large the portions were, it was a very good call indeed.

After chatting about all sorts of topics, we turned our attention to the most important matter: heading out to see Nightjars. And we succeeded, although, despite the warm and very calm weather, only one bird appeared in flight, with at least three others churring in the background. The most active bird wing-clapped as part of its display, as well as uttering its *krruit* call while in flight.

A Tawny Owl hooted in the background, but no bats appeared, which was perhaps slightly unusual. Several other birds were heard earlier in the evening as dusk descended, including Blackbird, Song Thrush, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Wren, Garden Warbler and Bullfinch. A Red Deer stag lay resting in a distant field on the horizon, our first mammal of the tour.

Day 2

Wednesday 27th May

The Crown Hotel, Dickie's Path and Hawk Combe

Hot and sunny with a light breeze, 30°C

The leader and one client headed out to the garden in the morning to enjoy the moth trap haul. Oliver had set up the box overnight and there was a decent catch of at least 131 individuals of forty-four species (of course, some got away before they were identified!). Along with four Cockchafers and an Orange Ladybird, we enjoyed some

beautiful species including Oblique, Flame, many Green Carpets, Privet Hawk-moth, Barred Umber, Blood-vein, Smoky Wave, Lunar Thorn, Scalloped Hazel, Small Angle Shades, Green Silver-lines and a delightful micro species, *Aethes cnicana*.

After breakfast, we headed to Webber's Post and walked Dickie's Path. We took our time to enjoy the stunning surroundings, and with the temperature not yet reaching the highs for the day, we were able to spend plenty of time scanning the heathland too. A pair of Dartford Warblers was the highlight for some, with two Crossbills, Siskin, Whitethroat, Tree Pipit, Willow Warbler and a Whinchat to add to the mix. Some flowers were braving the hot weather, notably carpets of Tormentil, Heath Bedstraw and Heath Milkwort. Wendy found a beetle which we were able to identify as a Black-spotted Longhorn Beetle; Garden Chafer and a click beetle (*Denticollis linearis*) were also seen, along with several Green Tiger Beetles. With Oliver's little identification pot, we were able to have a close-up view of the latter, and we could clearly see its very large mandibles.

The walk back through the woods on our return allowed us to enjoy a Wood Warbler singing, but there was no sign of any Cuckoos. The Bluebells here were just starting to wilt, much later than those on the southern slopes. After collecting our vehicle, we made our way to Horner Tearooms, only to find they were not serving savoury food due to the heat, so we headed into Porlock and found a delightful little café called Whortleberry Tearooms.

For our shorter afternoon walk, we drove into Hawk Combe, and then wandered along the lane towards the woods. We did not have a lot of time to explore this combe, but we enjoyed some new woodland flowers including Sanicle, Woodruff, Black Melick, Hairy Wood-rush and Wood Sedge. Wendy also found some caddisfly larvae wrapped in tiny pebbles in the stream.

Before dinner, we completed our checklists and made plans for Thursday. Dinner was an entertaining evening of stories and dramas, from trips taken by the group from all over the world.

Day 3

Thursday 28th May

Horner Wood and Bossington Hill

Sunny spells with sea mist along the coast, moderate wind, 19-27°C

Our day started at 7.30am with breakfast, before we headed to Horner Wood. In the car park, we spotted three raptor species circling overhead: two Red Kites, two Buzzards and a Sparrowhawk. We made our way along Horner Water and enjoyed two lovely sightings of Dippers. The first was a single juvenile bobbing up and down on rocks in the water, before we located an adult with a second juvenile a few hundred metres further along. We picked out some nice plants, including Bog Stitchwort, Common Fumitory and Yellow Pimpernel, among many other species already seen in quantity the day before.

Higher up in the woods, we located several Pied Flycatchers, with at least two nests and adults showing well as they brought food in for their chicks. Redstarts and Cuckoos both sang but were not close enough to get views, unfortunately. We did, however, see Marsh Tit, Treecreeper and Grey Wagtail very well.

As we meandered along Granny's Ride, we spotted the super little micro moth *Olethreutes acruella*, which feeds among the leaf litter as a larva, but was here basking (as an adult) in the sunshine along the edge of the path on bracken. It was a stunning little orange moth, with shining silver lines and intense patterning.

With the tea gardens not serving food once again, we returned to Porlock for another excellent lunch, before heading to Bossington Hill for our afternoon walk. No sooner had we arrived than thick sea mist poured in off the estuary and reduced our visibility greatly. The clear blue skies and hot temperatures we'd experienced for several days had vanished, as the thermometer plummeted to a decidedly cool 19°C!

We walked a loop to Selworthy Beacon, and despite the inhibiting conditions, we were able to locate four Green Hairstreak butterflies, many Meadow Pipits carrying food for their young, Stonechat, Redpoll and Linnet. A wonderful web of spiderlings caused some great excitement, although we're still yet to identify the species: they were absolutely tiny, with a bright yellow abdomen and a black splodge with little horns at the top end.

With checklists completed and dinner once again devoured and enjoyed, we retired for the night; our last adventures beckoning for our final day together.

Day 4

Friday 29th May

Chetsford Water and Dunkery Beacon

Cloudy start with sunshine later and a light breeze

Our final morning started a little cloudier, with a very light breeze. The heat from earlier in the week had passed, and we were looking forward to a cooler day in the National Park. We made the ten-minute drive to Chetsford Water and parked alongside a large line of Beech. This former hedge had now become substantial trees, and a decent windbreak across the moorland. A Cuckoo called but remained hidden, although we did get to see several during our walk, as it turned out.

The pace was deliberately slow, and we took our time to scan every stunted Hawthorn and Rowan, with Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff, Chaffinch and Wren popping up regularly. The highlights came in the form of several Whinchats, with a few Stonechats too. Cuckoos flew by several times and a pair of Mistle Thrushes also allowed reasonably good views. Small Heath butterflies and lots of Garden Chafers were busily flying about. The latter are quite destructive as larvae: they eat the roots of clover. As adults, they feed on fresh tree leaves and the petals of some flowering plants.

We continued along the valley, crossing a small stream a few times to get to Nutscale Reservoir (or at least close to it). We enjoyed sitting and gazing over the scene, a classic mix of scrubby woodland, steep hillsides and moorland vegetation. As we were about to depart, Oliver spotted a Water Vole and a male Beautiful Demoiselle. The sun had appeared, and the mammatus clouds of earlier had long since drifted by. It was getting warmer, and the chafers and butterflies were becoming more active: a Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary was a super bonus sighting for some. A group of Exmoor Ponies had wandered down to the stream to take a drink, but also to locate some perfect trees against which to have a good scratch!

We finished our tour at Dunkery Beacon. The weather was by now glorious, with blue skies, a distant haze and the lightest of breezes. We enjoyed our packed lunch overlooking the amazing green expanse of west Somerset, before setting off for our thirty-minute walk up to the beacon. From here, our views included the coastline, Wales, Dartmoor to the west, and Dorset to the south. It was absolutely magnificent. Our final sighting of a Wall Brown butterfly was a fitting end to the week, marked by beautifully hot weather and lots of wildlife.

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Species lists

Birds (H=heard only)

I = Introduced		May 2026			
Common name	Scientific name	26	27	28	29
Common Pheasant - I	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	H	✓		✓
European Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>	✓			
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>			H	✓
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>			✓	
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>			✓	
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>				✓
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>			✓	
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>			✓	✓
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓	✓	✓
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	H	H		
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		H	✓	
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>			✓	
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		✓		✓
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>			✓	✓
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		✓	✓	✓
Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>		H	✓	
Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>			✓	
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓	
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		✓	✓	✓
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		✓	✓	✓
Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		✓	✓	
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>			✓	
Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>		H		
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	H	✓	✓	✓
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	H	H	H	H
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		H	✓	
Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>	H	H		
Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>		✓		
Dartford Warbler	<i>Curruca undata</i>		✓		
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		H	✓	H
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	H	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		H	✓	
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	H	H	✓	
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>				✓
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	H	✓	✓	✓
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	H	✓	✓	✓
European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>		✓	✓	
Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>			H	
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>		✓		✓
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓	✓	✓
White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>			✓	

I = Introduced		May 2026			
Common name	Scientific name	26	27	28	29
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>			✓	
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		H	✓	✓
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		✓	✓	✓
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		✓	✓	✓
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	✓	✓
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>		✓		
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	H	H	H	✓
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		H		
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓	✓	✓
Redpoll	<i>Acanthis flammea</i>		✓	✓	
Common Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>		✓		
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>			✓	
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		✓	H	

Mammals

I = Introduced		May 2026			
Common name	Scientific name	26	27	28	29
European Rabbit - I	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>			✓	
European Water Vole	<i>Arvicola amphibius</i>				✓
Eastern Grey Squirrel - I	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>			✓	
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	✓			✓
Exmoor Pony - I	<i>Equus caballus</i>		✓	✓	✓

Butterflies

		May 2026			
Common name	Scientific name	26	27	28	29
Common Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>			✓	
Green-veined White	<i>Pieris napi</i>		✓		
Green Hairstreak	<i>Callophrys rubi</i>			✓	
Holly Blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>		✓	✓	
Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary	<i>Boloria selene</i>				✓
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>		✓	✓	✓
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>		✓	✓	✓
Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>		✓		✓
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>		✓	✓	
Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>				✓

Moths

L=larva		May 2026			
Common name	Scientific name	26	27	28	29
Diamond-back	<i>Plutella xylostella</i>		✓		
Arched Marble	<i>Olethreutes acruella</i>			✓	
Brindled Tortrix	<i>Ptycholoma lecheana</i>			✓	
Light Brown Apple-moth	<i>Epiphyas postvittana</i>		✓		
Thistle Conch	<i>Aethes cnicana</i>		✓		

L=larva		May 2026			
Common name	Scientific name	26	27	28	29
Ringed China-mark	<i>Parapoynx stratiotata</i>		✓		
Oak Eggar	<i>Lasiocampa quercus</i>		L		
Poplar Hawk-moth	<i>Laothoe populi</i>		✓		
Privet Hawk-moth	<i>Sphinx ligustri</i>		✓		
Elephant Hawk-moth	<i>Deilephila elpenor</i>		✓		
Smoky Wave	<i>Scopula ternata</i>		✓		
Blood-vein	<i>Timandra comae</i>		✓		
Oblique Carpet	<i>Orthonama vittata</i>		✓		
Garden Carpet	<i>Xanthorhoe fluctuata</i>		✓		
Flame Carpet	<i>Xanthorhoe designata</i>		✓		
Broken-barred Carpet	<i>Electrophaes corylata</i>		✓		
Small Phoenix	<i>Ecliptopera silaceata</i>		✓		
Common Marbled Carpet	<i>Dysstroma truncata</i>		✓		
Green Carpet	<i>Colostygia pectinataria</i>		✓		
Rivulet	<i>Perizoma affinitata</i>		✓		
Sandy Carpet	<i>Perizoma flavofasciata</i>		✓		
Common Pug	<i>Eupithecia vulgata</i>		✓		
Mottled Pug	<i>Eupithecia exiguata</i>		✓		
Small Seraphim	<i>Pterapherapteryx sexalata</i>		✓		
Clouded Border	<i>Lomaspilis marginata</i>		✓		
Brown Silver-line	<i>Petrophora chlorosata</i>		✓	✓	
Barred Umber	<i>Plagodis pulveraria</i>		✓		
Brimstone Moth	<i>Opisthograptis luteolata</i>		✓		
Lunar Thorn	<i>Selenia lunularia</i>		✓		
Scalloped Hazel	<i>Odontopera bidentata</i>		✓		
Peppered Moth	<i>Biston betularia</i>		✓		
Common Heath	<i>Ematurga atomaria</i>		✓		✓
Common White Wave	<i>Cabera pusaria</i>		✓		
White-pinion Spotted	<i>Lomographa bimaculata</i>		✓		
Clouded Silver	<i>Lomographa temerata</i>		✓		
Iron Prominent	<i>Notodonta dromedarius</i>		✓		
Pale Prominent	<i>Pterostoma palpina</i>		✓		
Buff-tip	<i>Phalera bucephala</i>		✓		
Pale Tussock	<i>Calliteara pudibunda</i>		✓		
Buff Ermine	<i>Spilosoma lutea</i>		✓		
White Ermine	<i>Spilosoma lubricipeda</i>		✓		
Spectacle	<i>Abrostola tripartita</i>		✓		
Silver Y	<i>Autographa gamma</i>		✓	✓	
Nut-tree Tussock	<i>Colocasia coryli</i>		✓		
Treble Lines	<i>Charanyca trigrammica</i>		✓		
Brown Rustic	<i>Rusina ferruginea</i>		✓		
Small Angle Shades	<i>Euplexia lucipara</i>		✓		
Heart and Dart	<i>Agrotis exclamationis</i>		✓		
Green Silver-lines	<i>Pseudoips prasinana</i>		✓		

Damselflies & dragonflies

Common name	Scientific name	May 2026			
		26	27	28	29
Beautiful Demoiselle	<i>Calopteryx virgo</i>				✓
Blue Emperor	<i>Anax imperator</i>		✓		

Other insects

		May 2026			
Common name	Scientific name	26	27	28	29
Shieldbugs					
Birch Shieldbug	<i>Elasmotethus interstinctus</i>		✓		
Flies					
September Cranefly	<i>Tipula paludosa</i>		✓		
Migrant Aphideater	<i>Eupeodes corollae</i>				✓
Bees, Wasps & Ants					
Woodland Red Ant	<i>Formica rufa</i>	1	✓	✓	
Western Honey Bee	<i>Apis mellifera</i>	2	✓		
Hornet	<i>Vespa crabro</i>	3		✓	
Early Bumblebee	<i>Bombus pratorum</i>	4	✓	✓	
Beetles					
Garden Chafer	<i>Phyllopertha horticola</i>		✓		✓
Common Cockchafer	<i>Melolontha melolontha</i>		✓		✓
Green Tiger Beetle	<i>Cicindela campestris</i>		✓		✓
Black-spotted Longhorn Beetle	<i>Rhagium mordax</i>		✓		
a click beetle	<i>Denticollis linearis</i>		✓		
Copper Click Beetle	<i>Ctenicera cuprea</i>				✓
Orange Ladybird	<i>Halyzia sedecimguttata</i>		✓		
Harlequin Ladybird	<i>Harmonia axyridis</i>		✓		

Spiders

Common name	Scientific name	May 2026			
		26	27	28	29
a spider	<i>Agelena labyrinthica</i>		✓	✓	
a wolf spider	<i>Pardosa</i> sp.			✓	
spiderlings	Araneae sp.			✓	

Gastropods

Common name	Scientific name	May 2026			
		26	27	28	29
Large Black Slug	<i>Arion ater</i>				✓