

Somerset's Summer Wildlife

Naturetrek Tour Report

10th – 13th June 2021



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Tour participants – Simon Breeze (Leader) with five Naturetrek clients.

Summary

The varied topography and associated habitats and landscapes of Somerset support a wide and varied mix of plants and animals. Summer is the perfect time to see the diversity of the area's wildlife at its best. With two AONBs, two nationally renowned and successful wetland restoration projects (one coastal and one inland) and some of the country's most species-rich grassland areas, the associated biodiversity was ripe for the viewing. The group spent an enjoyable long weekend exploring these varied landscapes across the county, using the scenic and comfortable setting of the Batch Country Hotel as a launch pad and retreat after a long days wildlife spotting.

Day 1

Thursday 10th June

After checking into the Hotel late afternoon on the first day, following introductions the group took advantage of the first few hours of the tour and undertook a short trip to Berrow Dunes, approximately 20 minutes drive to the north-west. En route, passing through the flat lowland floodplain grazing marsh field systems, a number of birds were heard singing and calling through the open windows of the minibus. These included Reed Warbler, Cetti's Warbler and Lesser Whitethroat. The first floral delight of the tour came in the form of a carpet of Southern Marsh Orchids just a few steps into the walk towards the dunes, situated adjacent to the coastal town of Berrow. Amongst the sward the shaking heads of Quaking Grass were also seen.

Carrying on through a golf course laid out between the dunes, a number of common plants were seen including Hound's Tongue, White Primrose, Gold Moss Stonecrop and Rest Harrow.

When entering the dunes, a wet flush running through lower ground provided an abundance of Hemlock Water-dropwort and Yellow Flag Iris, both of which supported clusters of nectaring insects, including Early Bumblebee, Buff-tailed Bumblebee, drone fly and Honey Bee. A Drinker moth caterpillar was also spotted clinging to an open leaf stem.

Onto the open, wide expanse of beach and the low tide kept a scattering of gulls far out across the flats. Species seen on the shoreline, and passing through overhead, included Herring, Lesser Black-back and Black-headed Gulls. Along the edge of the dunes a Sparrowhawk was seen darting through, keeping the Chiffchaffs, Blackcaps, Whitethroat and Greenfinch on high alert.

Back at the hotel the group enjoyed their first meal together while getting to know one another and discussing the itinerary for the coming days.

Day 2

Friday 11th June

Having set the moth traps within the hotel grounds the previous evening, the group assembled early before breakfast to go through the catch. Highlights of the morning included Gold Spot, sporting flashes of seemingly painted-on gold leaf, the migrant Silver-Y moth and the large and impressive Poplar Hawkmoth.

After a wholesome and filling breakfast the group embarked on their first full day's expedition and headed west to the Quantock Hills AONB and the small village of Holford. Heading through Hodder's Combe, surrounded by ancient western Atlantic oak woodland, the group were surrounded by common woodland bird song

including Blackcap, Chiffchaff and distant calls of Green and Great Spotted woodpecker. En route wonderful views of a female Roe Deer were enjoyed. Carefully making our way across short sections of streams flowing through the wooded valley the group climbed up along the side of the terrain where a passing glimpse of a male Pied Flycatcher was had as it came to land on a branch above us before moving into denser cover. As it was keeping out of view from some members of the group while hidden high up in the canopy the group moved on and were treated to another male emerging from a nearby nestbox.

Following a pleasant morning in a beautiful setting lunch was enjoyed at the nearby Plough Inn pub before we moved on to Steart Marshes. Situated in the northwest coast of Somerset, Steart Marshes is a re-alignment site – a feat of soft landscaping engineering, with a breach in the sea defences combining with natural forces to allow the tide to flow into a large designated area, creating salt marsh and wetland grassland habitats. The tide was out unfortunately during the visit, but a stroll up to the Parrett Estuary gave distant views of Avocet, Shelduck and Oystercatcher. Excitement in the cool coastal wind came in the form of passing Marsh Harrier gliding over the river mouth.

Strolling down to Otterhampton Marshes the group's fatigue following a fairly active day was starting to kick in, although on turning the corner at the last hide all sense of tiredness faded as the view ahead was filled with dozens of close Avocet. Among the distant birds chicks were also in tow, whilst an Oystercatcher was also spotted with a chick. Close to the hide, along the pebble shore, a Little Ringed Plover was spotted, its yellow eye ring clearly standing out and giving away its identity.

Content with a successful and enjoyable days woodland and wetland wildlife watching, the group travelled back to the Hotel, where after a short break an enjoyable meal was had.

Day 3

Saturday 12th June

Although some drizzle passed through the hotel grounds overnight the moth trap the following morning still attracted a wide mix of macro and micro moths. Among the larger macro moths highlights included Pale Tussock, Clouded Border and Green Carpet; while the smaller micro moths, though in smaller numbers, included male Ringed-china Mark, the Apple Ermine and the grassland specialist *Chrysoteuchia culmella*.

Following a filling breakfast, a change to the itinerary was agreed among the group due to warmer butterfly flight weather forecast the following day. Therefore, the group headed towards the Mendip Hills AONB, passing through the steep cliffs of Cheddar Gorge, to begin the day's excursion at Somerset Wildlife Trust's Black Rock Nature Reserve. We walked through the start of the Cheddar complex of reserves which pass through shallow valleys containing a mosaic of broadleaved woodland and species-rich grassland. First highlight of the trip came in the form of a confiding male Wren singing from the top of a bare, high branch. After taking in the impressive gusto of this small bird with a big voice, the group moved on and was soon treated to a Spotted Flycatcher flying in across the valley to a high tree line.

Moving on to a stretch of limestone grassland, butterflies soon followed with Common Blue, Small Heath and Small Copper seen nectaring between flower clumps of Bird's-foot Trefoil and Red Clover. Bird song heard flowing down from the steep banks clad with clumps of scrub and scattered trees included the wistful descending notes of Willow Warbler, the scratchy warble of Common Whitethroat, with Blackcap heard throughout.

Continuing to a steep species-rich limestone grassland bank more butterflies, including Grizzled Skipper, Dingy Skipper, Brimstone and Brown Argus were spotted, some of which were defending small territories. Closely scanning the herb layer, a Red-tailed Mason bee was soon spotted travelling back to its nest site. The group then came together to enjoy watching the fascinating behaviour of this solitary bee repeatedly bring small stems of dry grass back to a snail shell to thatch over the entrance of the shell opening. Before moving on to this stage, the mason bee had established a nest by constructing mud chambers within the shell and then filling them with eggs.

After watching the fascinating breeding behaviour of the small, but impressive, mason bee the group moved on to the shallow grassland combe of Velvet Bottom, where a faint Redstart was heard in the distance. Otherwise, more common warblers were heard, with a large group of Rooks and Jackdaws passing over, some of which were mobbing a passing Raven. Overhead a Red Kite also flew into view, clearly showing its forked tail.

With the day heating up the group headed back into Cheddar where it was decided to have a picnic lunch sitting on the shore of Cheddar Reservoir, watching a sailing boat race take place before us. Following lunch a short walk was taken around the country lanes to the south of the reservoir where more common resident and migrant birds were seen, along with a natural Honey Bee nest located within a mature oak tree. Red Admirals and Small White Butterflies fluttered along the hedgerow and Buff-tailed Bumblebees nectared on bramble flowers.

With an evening excursion planned, the group headed back to the hotel for some down time in the late afternoon sun before dinner. Following another delicious evening meal the group headed out to the nearby viewpoint atop Bleadon Hill, located on the western expanse of the Mendip Hills, just as the sun dipped down over the Bristol Channel casting a beautiful warm glow over the surrounding landscape.

With the light fading all around the group made its way through a dense wooded lane, where the first bats, in the form of Soprano Pipistrelle, of the evening was picked up on the detectors at first, then visually as they whizzed among the crowd. Coming out into an open, sloping farm track the bat activity increased with several bats seen passing to and fro, with the detectors confirming Common and Soprano Pipistrelle, along with Serotine. Further up the slope a rare Barbastelle bat was also recorded. After travelling a little further into the darkness, picking up the same species, with the addition of Nathusius's Pipistrelle the group decided to head back to the van, then on to the hotel after a successful and enjoyable days wildlife spotting across the Mendip Hills.

Day 4

Sunday 13th June

Checking the trap before breakfast, moth numbers were down compared to previous night, but none-the-less highlights came in the form a fresh Poplar Hawkmoth, Pebble Prominent, Elephant Hawkmoth and the Lackey.

After checking out of our rooms with the sun already providing warmth for the day ahead the group headed to Ham Wall. Walking along the old Glastonbury railway line, now converted to the main pathway through the site, Willow Warblers were heard singing all around, joined by Garden Warbler, Cetti's Warbler and Chiffchaff. Glancing down over a bridge a Banded Demoiselle and Four-spotted Chaser dragonflies were seen perched among marginal vegetation. Further along the path the group came to the first viewpoint where wide-ranging views were enjoyed across the large expanse of reedbed. Walking on to the Avalon hide the group enjoyed wonderful views of Bittern and Marsh Harrier in flight, with the pools in front of the hide showing Great Crested Grebe and Coot and their chicks.

Anther picnic lunch was enjoyed within a cool, shaded open hide, complete with views of common wildfowl and a passing Great White Egret. Shortly afterwards the group headed back into the centre of the reserve before moving on to the Polden Hills.

With the temperature now hitting the high twenties it appeared the opportune time to spot butterflies on the wing. In fact, the conditions were potentially too hot for butterflies with little general activity on the wing as the group slowly explored the calcareous species-rich slopes of Somerset Wildlife Trust's Green Down reserve. While in search of butterflies, a number of orchids were enjoyed throughout the afternoon including Pyramidal, Common, Bee and Greater Butterfly Orchid.

Fortunately, the main target of the afternoon's visit didn't take too long to find, as a female Large Blue butterfly was spotted on a grass stem close to its larval food plant, Wild Thyme. Throughout the rest of the visit a few more Large Blues were seen, although due to the heat the butterflies had no need to warm up through thermoregulation and tended to stay positioned away from the sun, their wings held up.

On the way back up to the pathway, a Kestrel was seen hovering over the surrounding farmed landscape, while a Red Kite also passed through, with Linnet hopping through the scrub patches below.

Two of the group decided to drive onwards at the end of the walk, while the rest of the group made their way back to hotel, where the party said their farewells, bringing an enjoyable and successful long weekend exploring Somerset's special summer wildlife to a close.

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Species Lists

Birds

	Common name	Scientific name	June 2021			
			10	11	12	13
1	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>				✓
2	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			✓	✓
3	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓		✓
4	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>				✓
5	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		✓		✓
6	Great Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>				✓
7	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓			✓
8	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		✓		✓
9	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>		✓		
10	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>		✓		✓
11	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓	✓	✓
12	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>				✓
13	Eurasian Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		✓		✓
14	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	✓			
15	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓		✓	✓
16	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>			✓	✓
17	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>				✓
18	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>		✓		✓
19	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	✓			
20	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>				✓
21	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>			✓	✓
22	Common Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		✓		✓
23	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>		✓		
24	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>		✓		
25	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		✓	✓	✓
26	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>		✓		✓
27	Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓		✓
28	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
29	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
30	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
31	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		✓	✓	
32	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
33	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		✓	✓	
34	Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		✓	✓	
35	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		✓	✓	✓
36	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
37	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>		✓		

	Common name	Scientific name	June 2021			
			10	11	12	13
38	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>		✓	✓	✓
39	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		✓		
40	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
41	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
42	Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>			✓	
43	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
44	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
45	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
46	Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>		✓		
47	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
48	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>				✓
49	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	✓	✓		✓
50	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
51	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>			✓	✓
52	Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>	✓		✓	✓
53	Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Curruca curruca</i>	✓			
54	Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
55	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>		✓		✓
56	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
57	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>			✓	
58	Bearded Tit	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>				✓
59	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		✓	✓	✓
60	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>		✓	✓	
61	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓	✓
62	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓	✓
63	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		✓		
64	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		✓		
65	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		✓	✓	
66	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
67	Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
68	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>		✓	✓	✓
69	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
70	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓	✓
71	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
72	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
73	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
74	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓			
75	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
76	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓			✓
77	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>				✓

Mammals

	Common name	Scientific name	June 2021			
			10	11	12	13
1	European Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>		✓		
2	European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		✓	✓	
3	Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>		✓		
4	European Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>		✓		
5	Barbastelle Bat	<i>Barbastella barbastellus</i>			✓	
6	Common Pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i>			✓	
7	Soprano Pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus pygmaeus</i>			✓	
8	Common Noctule Bat	<i>Nyctalus noctula</i>		✓		
9	Serotine Bat	<i>Eptesicus serotinus</i>			✓	

Invertebrates

	Common name	Scientific name	June 2021			
			10	11	12	13
Dragonflies and Damselflies						
1	Emperor Dragonfly	<i>Anax imperator</i>				✓
2	Broad-bodied Chaser	<i>Libellula depressa</i>				✓
3	Four-spotted Chaser	<i>Libellula quadrimaculata</i>				✓
4	Southern Hawker	<i>Aeshna cyanea</i>				✓
5	Brown Hawker	<i>Aeshna grandis</i>		✓		
6	Banded Demoiselle	<i>Calopteryx splendens</i>			✓	✓
7	Blue-tailed Damselfly	<i>Ischnura elegans</i>				✓
8	Azure Damselfly	<i>Coenagrion puella</i>				✓
9	Common Blue Damselfly	<i>Enallagma cyathigerum</i>				✓
10	Variable Damselfly	<i>Coenagrion pulchellum</i>			✓	✓
11	Small Red Damselfly	<i>Ceriagrion tenellum</i>				✓
Butterflies						
1	Orange Tip	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>			✓	
2	Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>			✓	✓
3	Comma	<i>Polygonia c-album</i>				✓
4	Large Blue	<i>Phengaris arion</i>				✓
5	Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>			✓	✓
6	Brown Argus	<i>Aricia agestis</i>			✓	✓
7	Small Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>			✓	
8	Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>	✓	✓	✓	
9	Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>			✓	
10	Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
11	Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>			✓	

			June 2021			
	Common name	Scientific name	10	11	12	13
12	Dingy Skipper	<i>Erynnis tages</i>			✓	
13	Grizzled Skipper	<i>Pyrgus malvae</i>			✓	
14	Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>			✓	✓
	Moths					
1	Common Swift	<i>Korscheltellus lupulina</i>		1	1	
2	Nematopogon schwarziellus	<i>Nematopogon schwarziellus</i>				1
3	Apple Ermine	<i>Yponomeuta malinellus</i>		2	1	1
4	Light Brown Apple moth	<i>Epiphyas postvittana</i>		2		
5	Agapeta hamana	<i>Agapeta hamana</i>		1		
6	Eudonia angustea	<i>Eudonia angustea</i>		1		
7	Chrysoteuchia culmella	<i>Chrysoteuchia culmella</i>			1	
8	Ringed China Mark	<i>Parapoynx stratiotata</i>		1	1	
9	The Lackey	<i>Malacosoma neustria</i>				1
10	Poplar hawkmoth	<i>Laothoe populi</i>		2	1	1
11	Elephant Hawkmoth	<i>Deilephila elpenor</i>				1
12	Small Elephant Hawkmoth	<i>Deilephila porcellus</i>		2		
13	Garden Carpet	<i>Xanthorhoe fluctuata</i>			1	
14	Green Carpet	<i>Colostygia pectinataria</i>		1		
15	Clouded Border	<i>Lomaspilis marginata</i>			1	
16	Willow Beauty	<i>Peribatodes rhomboidaria</i>		1	2	1
17	Clouded Silver	<i>Lomographa temerata</i>		1		
18	Light Emerald	<i>Campaea margaritaria</i>		1		
19	Brussels Lace	<i>Cleorodes lichenaria</i>		1		
20	Pebble Prominent	<i>Notodonta ziczac</i>				1
21	Pale Tussock	<i>Calliteara pudibunda</i>		2	4	
22	White Ermine	<i>Spilosoma lubricipeda</i>		1	1	1
23	Silver Y	<i>Autographa gamma</i>		1		
24	Gold Spot	<i>Plusia festucae</i>		1		
25	The Uncertain	<i>Hoplodrina octogenaria</i>			1	
26	The Rustic	<i>Hoplodrina blanda</i>				1
27	Treble Lines	<i>Charanyca trigrammica</i>		1		
28	Common Rustic	<i>Mesapamea secalis</i>			1	
29	Marbled Minor agg	<i>Oligia strigilis</i>		2	4	1
30	Bright-line Brown-eye	<i>Lacanobia oleracea</i>		1		
31	Common Wainscott	<i>Mythimna pallens</i>				1
32	Heart and Dart	<i>Agrotis exclamationis</i>		4	3	3
33	Shuttle-shaped Dart	<i>Agrotis puta</i>		1	1	
34	Flame Shoulder	<i>Ochropleura plecta</i>		2	4	
35	Ingrailed Clay	<i>Diarsia mendica</i>		1	1	

	Common name	Scientific name	June 2021			
			10	11	12	13
36	Square-spot Rustic	<i>Xestia xanthographa</i>				1
	Other invertebrates					
1	Buff-tailed bumblebee	<i>Bombus Terrestris</i>	✓		✓	✓
2	Early Bumblebee	<i>Bombus pratorum</i>			✓	✓
3	Red-tailed Bumblebee	<i>Bombus pratorum</i>			✓	✓
4	Red-tailed Mason Bee	<i>Osmia bicolor</i>			✓	
5	Honey Bee	<i>Apis mellifera</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Drone Fly	<i>Eristalis Tenax</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
		<i>Volucella pellucens</i>			✓	
7	Red Cardinal Beetle	<i>Pyrochroa coccinea</i>			✓	

Orchids

	Common name	Scientific name	June 2021			
			10	11	12	13
1	Greater Butterfly Orchid	<i>Platanthera chlorantha</i>				✓
2	Pyramidal Orchid	<i>Anacamptis pyramidalis</i>				✓
3	Common Spotted Orchid	<i>Dactylorhiza fuchsii</i>				✓
4	Bee Orchid	<i>Ophrys apifera</i>				✓
5	Southern Marsh Orchid	<i>Dactylorhiza praetermissa</i>	✓			