

## Archive reports 2024

### **Seaton Wetlands Reserve. Sunday 14th January 2024**

Before leaving North Devon for the South Devon coastal town of Seaton, we were serenaded by the early morning chortling song of a blackbird. In front of the car a magpie flew up from its roadkill breakfast, leaving it to the last second and then a flock of sheep clattered their way across the road before entering a grassy field en masse.

A slight drizzle descending from grey skies fell, as we began our journey across the county. Further on thick mists hung in the valleys. Two buzzards were spied, one at the top of a tree and the other atop a telegraph pole.

Nearing our destination we passed a clump of daffodils by the roadside as the skies began to clear and the wind dropped to nothing.

Our destination was the Seaton Wetlands Reserve adjoining the town. This area of marshland, reed beds and lagoons by the River Axe was created as a flood defence project. As a result of this a habitat of tidal lagoons was formed where the water levels and salinity could be controlled.



Artificial Sand Martin Nesting Site pic by John Short.

Seaton Wetlands reserve consists of three main areas, Colyford Common, Black Hole Marsh and the separated Seaton Marshes. On arrival in the car park, goldfinch, chaffinch and long tailed tit were immediately recorded. Entering the reserve we were treated to spectacular views across the valley under clear blue skies. It was hard to imagine that only two weeks ago “Storm Henk” caused flooding over this area leaving some paths under inches of water, evidence of which could still be seen. Some of the bird life here appeared to be accustomed to the many visitors who have travelled the well constructed walkways over the years, as dunnock and blackbird came very close to us, plus a robin that almost fed from my hand.

Shelduck swam serenely across the still waters of a pond as we made our way to the Tower hide from which we could see across the tramway and the river, as redshank and oystercatchers patrolled the far mudbank. The vibrant colours of lapwing glistened brilliantly under the sun. (This green plover has many local names, one of which is chewit named after its familiar call and in Bradworthy they are known as horniwinks).

Next stop was the Island hide aptly named for its position in the middle of a lagoon and connected to the shore by a screened walkway. This hide provided us with nearly 360 degree viewing. It was interesting to watch the many teal alternately dabbling and then splashing their wings on the water. Those of us who had not yet eaten then moved on to the Discovery hide to consume our packed lunches whilst watching a brace of moorhens feeding around the small pond outside.

On then to the bird hide overlooking the Axe and Colyford Common as we passed wooden sculptures, some adorned with bobble hats, to walk over the well constructed boardwalk. From the hide we had the sighting of the day. Among the grazing Canada geese was an unmistakable bar headed goose. Plenty of wigeon were seen here plus a lone greenshank.

Time now for our last visit, half a mile along the road to Seaton Marsh. First a walk around Borrow Pit, a secluded pond, where otters have previously been seen before heading out to the bird hide. Here we were rewarded with sightings of a curlew plus a kingfisher in the lower branches of a tree overhanging the stream running past the hide. JS

## Lee Bay Woodlands. Sunday 17th March 2024

Our March outing once again found us heading for a venue on our West Country coastline. Nearing our destination an ominous persistent drizzle descended from a grey sky, as a thick sea mist appeared in the distance. However, the weather began improving as we wound our way down the steep twisting road of the narrow Borough Valley leading to the quaint little hamlet of Lee nestling beside the bay of the same name. Hugging the sides of this valley are trees of the rare Atlantic rain forest. These woodland habitats are found on the western coasts of the UK with its mild climate and relatively high rainfall. This provides the ideal habitat for the lower plants such as lichens, mosses, fungi, liverworts and ferns. These areas are least affected by air pollution and can be especially rich in lichens, an abundance of which generally indicates a cleaner atmosphere. Today we were lucky to have the services of Dr Eirene Williams, a consultant environmental scientist who would be leading our walk.



Dr Eirene Williams talking about Lower Plant Life (E Beer)

After a short introductory talk we found ourselves entering the woodland and it was not long before we came across a variety of lower plant life. First off, were a couple of mosses. Eirene explained to us the two different types, pleurocarps (sprawling) and acrocarps (vertical). Often difficult to identify with the naked eye, small samples were collected in a tray to be more accurately identified later on under a microscope.

Following the clear waters of a raging stream we plodded up the adjoining muddy path with plenty of lush growth around us. Two varieties of liverworts were plucked from the banks of the stream as the bright colours of a scarlet elf cup fungus peered out from under a fallen tree.

Making our way up through the woods we were serenaded with a variety of bird song. Numerous displays of primroses, celandines, wood anemones and golden saxifrage brightened our journey. A polypore bracket fungus clung to the side of a tree stump and on another was a "King Alfred's cake" normally associated with ash trees. Among other fungi noted were the hairy stereum, an orange-yellow bracket like fungus and the very tiny candle snuff with its young, white antler like stems, usually found on dead wood. Other mosses included the common thuidium similar in form to a tamarisk tree and the usnea, the familiar beard like moss.

As it was early in their growing season only the unfurling crosiers of the young ferns were becoming visible. However the mature ferns of the previous year's growth were still present and Eirene was able to give us a guide to their growth forms. These went from a pinnate frond (undivided) to a tripinnate frond (three times divided). We were able to identify examples of each category along the way from the undivided Hart's tongue, the pinnate fern of the many fingered polypody, the bipinnate lady fern and the tripinnate broad buckler fern.



Lady Fern (E Beer)

It was now time to head back to the car park of the ancient Grampus Inn and to show our appreciation for the use of their car park, by consuming a Sunday lunch. This we did under an outside veranda which was now warming up from the Springlike sun.

A very interesting walk on a subject very often overlooked. The day was rounded off with tea and cakes overlooking the ebbing tide of the River Taw with a lonely looking little egret standing on a now revealed sandbank above which we could see the faint outline of a crescent moon.

JS

### **Brownsham Woods. 14th April 2024**

After enduring what seemed to be endless weeks of high winds and wet weather our group gathered in the National Trust car park at Brownsham Farm. Emerging from our cars, above us a blue sky was decorated with fluffy white clouds being pushed along by a fresh breeze. We were in North Devon's Hartland peninsula with its tall cliffs and rugged coastline. Our late Spring walk would take us down to the pebbly beach at Mouthmill.

Driving to the venue the roadside verges seemed to be lined with a multitude of golden dandelion discs. Walking down the wide stony path towards the sea we were now rewarded with displays of English bluebells spreading throughout the woodlands rising steeply away from us.



Brownsham Woods - Bluebells by E Beer

The leaves on the trees were not yet fully formed but it still seemed difficult to spot the bird life. However, this was more than compensated for by various bird songs amongst which were chiffchaff, robin, blackcap and nuthatch, the latter whose name derives from its habit of wedging nuts into a crevice and using its powerful bill to break them open. A holly blue butterfly was photographed on nearby vegetation and a micro moth alighted upon one of our group. Bracken grew profusely along the sides of our path and on one frond was a seven spot ladybird and on an adjacent frond was an attractive shield bug.

Once again we were lucky with the weather, as a week or so earlier we would have had to negotiate slippery muddy pathways. The constant roar of the gushing stream we were following down to the sea, was evidence of the recent heavy rainfall. Now, as the sun peered out from behind the cotton wool clouds, a brimstone butterfly fluttered its way between the trees. In comparison a slime mould was photographed on a rotting fallen tree trunk. Apart from the bluebells, water dropwort and golden saxifrage, the wild flowers were not yet in abundance. However it was nice pass the occasional clumps of contrasting colour of lady's smock, yellow pimpernel, bugle, herb Robert, dog violet and wild strawberry. As we emerged from the woodland an entirely new panorama opened up for us as we gazed over the pebbly beach onto the open waters of the Bristol Channel. This was an ideal spot to eat our packed lunches as we sprawled over the grassy banks beneath the towering cliffs. On one side of us grew a clump of sea campion whilst on the other side stood the remains of an old lime kiln where in the past, layers of limestone and coal were burnt. The resulting product was spread over the local acidic farmland to increase the PH and the fertility.





Members of the Taw and Exmoor Branch at Mouthmill Beach by E Beer

Looking out to sea a fishing boat ploughed its way across the blue/green waters of the bay. A gannet and then a cormorant flew past us .It was not hard to imagine similar sights were seen by smugglers in days gone by as Mouthmill was known for this activity. The most prominent sight was that of Blackchurch rock, a high gothic shaped natural rock structure standing offshore with its two cathedral window shaped openings.



Black Church Rock by J Flacke

Feasting over, a quick group snapshot and then a steep winding climb up through the woods to the fields atop where a cooling breeze was most welcome. Now a more level walk past flowering blackthorn to the car park and more refreshment at the nearby farm with a cream tea. JS

## Volehouse and Cory Manor, Sunday 2nd June 2024

Another beautiful day as the sun shone down from a lovely blue sky which had just the occasional wispy cirrus cloud. More importantly there was hardly a zephyr of breeze as today's target species was the marsh fritillary butterfly. A small but beautifully marked butterfly with brown, orange and yellow chequered patterns and not found all over the country but luckily for us found in Devon. It is one of the country's most threatened butterflies having suffered a severe decline in recent years.



Marsh Fritillary Butterfly E Beer

Having met on the Pill car park in Bideford where we amalgamated into fewer cars, we set off along the narrow Devon lanes that got narrower as the journey went on. The vibrant greens of a variety of ferns were interspersed with the different colours of the foxgloves, buttercups, cow parsley and herb Robert. We soon arrived at the Volehouse reserve which is run by the Devon Wildlife Trust (DWT) and it is one of Devon's finest culm grassland reserves. This undisturbed habitat is ideal for the marsh fritillary.

As we started our walk skylarks were singing from on high as a kestrel hovered nearby and the first butterfly appeared but it was a speckled wood. Into the next field and we were confronted by a mass of yellow buttercups backed by acres of red sorrel. Chiffchaffs and willow warblers were busy singing as a buzzard wheeled overhead. A small butterfly was seen, which when it finally condescended to settle turned out to be a marsh fritillary. Hotly pursued by a lady from the DWT who was carrying out a survey of these butterflies at this site. She said they were on cue as they don't appear before 10.45 am (my kind of butterfly) and it was now just gone 11 o'clock. In an adjoining field she had already counted some 50 of them so this is obviously a good site for them. Then more excitement as not one but two red kites circled and spiralled above us.

Further on we came across more marsh fritillaries whilst being careful not to step on the common spotted orchids that were just coming into flower. We continued our descent to the wooded area adjoining the River Torridge which at this stage of its life is a large stream. Beautiful demoiselles were flitting about and then as we came out into the sunshine again, it was time to enjoy our packed lunches before climbing back up the hill to the cars.



Common Spotted Orchid



BNA Members at Volehouse Nature Reserve

Both photos E. Beer.

Now it was time for the second part of the trip. To see the wild flower meadows at Cory Manor which is a grade 11 listed building. It stands in several acres of meadowland, shrubs and mature trees plus a large pond which was attracting numbers of large red damselflies and mating blue damselflies.. Nuthatch and tree creeper were both heard whilst we inspected a small stone structure which looked as if it housed a well but basically it protected a fresh water spring. There was a good showing of yellow rattle which is essential if you are creating a wild flower meadow.

Just across the road was Putford Church which was built in 1620 and is entered via a very old and solid looking door which houses a sanctuary handle (Apparently any criminal cannot be arrested if he is holding on to this handle). Part of the floor was still tiled with 14th century floor tiles made in Barnstaple depicting royal emblems such as fleur-de-lis, swans, roses and lions.

Our host then invited us back for tea and cakes which were gratefully consumed as we sat in an open fronted stone building in which swallows were nesting and we were serenaded by a song thrush. Eventually we had to drag ourselves away after another enjoyable and successful day. BS.

## **BNA Tav and Exmoor Branch Nature Holiday Dorset, June 10th-14th, 2024**

### **Monday, 10th June**

First stop was the RSPB reserve at **Swellwood** about 11 miles south east of Taunton. We all arrived well ahead of time which enabled us to spend more time in the hide from which we could see both little egret and herons' nests high up in the trees.



RSPB Swellwood EB

In the foreground was a collection of grey squirrels, one of which was busy stripping the bark off a young tree. Treecreepers were active running up a large tree just outside the hide whilst blackcaps and blackbirds seemed to be having a singing competition. A scruffy looking, juvenile robin kept putting in an appearance along with coal tits, great tits, long tailed tits, a goldcrest, chaffinches and nuthatches.

That got us off to a good start and then we walked the circular route which gave us panoramic views over the Somerset Levels. Along side the path the hart's tongue ferns were particularly impressive and then we came across a very dilapidated bug hotel not that the occupants were complaining about the condition of it. We tried to visit the meadow area which allegedly had lots of nice flowers but after a long detour we gave up trying to find it and continued on our circular walk.





View from Green Down Nature Reserve EB

Next stop was Charlton Mackrell for a quick snack before we visited the 15 acre Somerset Wildlife reserve at **Green Down** to look for the large blue butterfly which has been successfully reintroduced there. In ideal conditions of a hot sun and very little breeze our hopes were high. After a hike up a stony path we came across a suitable area and proceeded along this south facing hillside but apart from a brimstone and the occasional gatekeeper there was nothing else in the butterfly line. Early spotted and pyramidal orchids were seen plus wild strawberries, ox-eye daisies and plenty of buttercups although the stars of the show were small scabious, rockrose and greater butterfly orchids. A few spots of rain and we thought our chances of seeing the large blue were gone but after we climbed through a hedge the sun came out again. A couple of small blue butterflies were having a bit of a ding-dong, when we came across a different butterfly, yes it was a large blue hotly pursued by a rather tatty looking marbled white.

After such a success it was off to Kingston Country Courtyard where we were staying and after registering we enjoyed a well earned dinner although the drinks were rather expensive.

## Tuesday, 11th June

When we arrived at the RSPB reserve at **Arne**, a lot of the footpaths and areas were closed off to the general public as it was the third week of the BBC's Springwatch programme which was based there this year. With all this extra activity there was a general paucity of birds to be seen although chiffchaffs, wrens and song thrushes were frequently heard. We did have a family of long tailed tits that accompanied us for part of the walk. Down by the water there were a few herring and black headed gulls plus a tern that made a fleeting appearance but too quick to be positively identified. Other water birds included shelduck, Canada geese, cormorants and a redshank. A couple of sika deer were grazing along the edge of the water.



Bird Watching at Arne EB

The most activity occurred at the dragonfly pond with emperor dragonflies, four spotted and broad bodied chasers plus blue and both large and small red damselflies. Further on we came across a raft spider. Then on the return walk we came across some 40+ curly haired pigs in an enclosure which were being used to turn the grass over and expose the bare earth to encourage wild flowers to germinate. A quick visit to the cafe and along side was someone painting a mural on a wall depicting a selection of some of the inhabitants of the reserve. It was subsequently featured on Springwatch. A quick walk to the raft spider pond but all we found were small white day flying moths flying about. Then up the slope in the hope of seeing Dartford warblers and raptors which this heathland area is noted for. No raptors had been seen all day nor did we see the warbler but we did however see the tail end of a sand lizard which seemed to be stuck at the entrance to it's burrow for some time.

Back to the place where we were staying but the roe deer and free range donkeys seen on the outward journey were no longer there on the road side. Suitably smartened up it was off to The Scott Arms just down the road for dinner. We all had a good meals especially those who had fish and chips as the fish was longer than the plate.

### Wednesday, 12th June

No lying in bed today as we had to get the ferry from Poole to **Brownsea** Island at 10.00am. We all managed to get seats on the outside on the upper deck in the hope of seeing the resident ospreys which were nesting in Poole harbour. None appeared but we did have common terns diving into the water like miniature gannets. Once we had disembarked, we shuffled through the entry system before being let loose on the 500 acre island.



Brownsea Island Sandwich Terns feeding young EB

Top of the wish list was to see the red squirrels and most of us managed that in the first 10 minutes after passing the construction of what will be a magnificent viewing hide. Hide? Looked more like a palace.

Past some grey lag geese and their goslings when some were lucky enough to spot a water rail. Into the avocet hide to see innumerable breeding black headed gulls and common terns, some with eggs and some with youngsters. Any stray youngster was given a severe pecking by the incorrect adults as it desperately sought it's parents. There were a few shelduck and Canada geese in the lagoon plus an avocet in the distance. A high powered telescope linked to a screen gave fantastic views of the activity everywhere on the water and on the protected breeding islands. A boardwalk through the reed beds only produced a four spotted chaser. Up to the lake hide which gave super views out over the lake in the wildlife protected area which produced more shelducks and a mallard family. Unfortunately the cordoned off area prevented us from carrying on along our circular route so we retraced our steps and visited the tern hide, where as we got near, was a sign requesting a quiet approach. I don't think the birds had read the sign as the noise they generated was tremendous. Views from the hide included close ups of breeding sandwich terns and more black headed gulls. A quick diversion into the cafe and a return to the red squirrel area behind the church to see the red squirrels again. Not only were we successful again but a peacock put in an appearance as well.





View from Brownsea Island EB

The weather on the return journey was still dry but a bit nippy in the wind when the sun went in. Back to the hotel before going out to dinner at The Halfway Inn and then later to try and find the nightjars. The place where we had chosen to eat was short staffed so we thought that would be ideal as it would take some time to be served and it would be dusk by the time we would come to leave. Incredibly we were served so quickly that we finished our meal just as a red sky of a lovely sunset appeared and obviously too bright (and now getting too cold) for going to look for nightjars. So back to the hotel it was.

#### Thursday, 12th June

Today's outing was to the **Tadnoll and Winfrith** reserve belonging to the Dorset Wildlife Trust. It extends to some 450 acres and is an internationally important heathland and wetland divided by the Tadnoll brook, a chalk stream tributary to the River Frome. We could possibly find all six UK reptiles here plus some rare aquatic plants.



Birdwatching at Winfrith Nature Reserve EB

The weather was not conducive to sun bathing reptiles but undeterred we entered the reserve to the unmistakable calls of chiffchaffs and yellow hammers but still not able to see them. A couple of linnets put in an appearance together with a very smart stonechat. On the ground were lousewort, milkwort, hop trefoil and in the distance a little egret. That was quite a surprise to see that there. Around to a bird hide which overlooked a former dragonfly paradise but now somewhat overgrown. On the return leg we came across a yellow banded longhorn beetle with its long antennae. A species that had also been featured on Springwatch.



Yellow banded longhorn male a day flying moth EB

Then to everyone's surprise and delight we came across some sundews and then to prove that they captured and devoured insects, one had partly eaten a butterfly which had been a silver studded blue. To our relief we then had excellent views of live silver studded blues and were all amazed at their small size..The wind was now picking up and by 1.00 pm we had the first spots of rain but not before we had a very fleeting glimpse of a Dartford warbler. It was now a race against time to get back to the cars before the predicted heavy rain arrived.

The hurriedly rearranged itinerary involved a visit to a nearby walled garden and adjoining cafe, where we consumed a fair amount of tea, coffee, cakes and some huge sandwiches.

In the evening it was only a few minutes drive to The New Inn at Church Knowle for another good dinner and one for which we did not have to pre-order.

### Friday, 14th June

Those who had not already seen the peregrine nesting on the ruins of the castle at **Corfe Castle**, as featured on Springwatch, drove around to have a look and had one calling whilst flying around and one sat on a ledge.



Corfe Castle site of Peregrine nest EB

Next it was a visit on our way home to the RSPB reserve at **Radipole**. A 200 acre reserve of reed beds and lagoons in the centre of Weymouth. There were lots of sand martins flying around as featured by Iolo Williams on Springwatch earlier in the week. Also there were some mute swans with cygnets, great crested grebes and a coot, probably the first one of the trip. Cetti's warblers were everywhere with their traditional explosive burst of song from deep in the reeds. Eventually we managed to see one. We searched in vain for the marsh harriers and bearded tits for which the reserve is well known. We wondered if the pictures shown on Springwatch were library pictures and not taken that week.



RSPB Radipole EB

A good sized fish was noticed swimming in the slow moving waters as an emperor dragonfly darted around. Alongside the footpath were several good sized southern marsh orchids plus comfrey and hedge woundwort. A quick visit to the cafe which overlooked the reserve and we decided not to visit the reserve at Lodmoor as the main attraction are the common terns and we had already had close views of them breeding at Brownsea.

So now home it was and we made good time until we got to the home of the traffic jam, as it took over half an hour to get through Barnstaple although the new system at the Cedars roundabout seemed to be working well.  
B.S

### **Hartland Point July 14th 2024**

Hartland Point is at the northwestern tip of Devon and marks the western limit of the Bristol Channel. The area has 325 ft high cliffs and is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a Special Area of Conservation and an SSSI. As we approached the area after turning off the A39, the roads got windier, hillier and narrower. The hedgerows produced never ending displays of meadowsweet plus the occasional clumps of cow parsley, ragwort and red campion.



Hartland Point EB

There was a very good attendance for this outing on a lovely calm Summer's day. Immediately after leaving the car park some over enthusiastic members thought they had seen a grey seal but it turned out to be a buoy bobbing about in the clear waters below. They weren't disappointed for too long however as several genuine seals were soon spotted lazily playing in the still waters of Batley Bay.

Moving on from this peaceful scene we climbed up the steep narrow path to the enclosed radio mast. Numerous wild flowers were passed as we went up the slope including wood sage, blue scabious and the purple and yellow



woody nightshade, whilst above us was the unmistakable sound of a skylark. A juvenile stonechat on the adjoining gorse clicked out it's warning message. From this vantage point we could just see the last remains of a ship which foundered on these treacherous rocks many years ago. Each time we visit this site, the rusty remains get less and less.



Rose and Thick Legged Flower Beetle EB

Out to sea, we could see Lundy some 12 miles away whilst several vessels made their way across the water ranging from a large cargo ship, a couple of yachts and a fishing boat trailing a very long net behind it. Whether it caught anything we didn't know but there no sea birds in attendance. In fact apart from herring gulls there was a complete absence of sea birds where normally there are gannets, fulmars, shearwaters, shags and cormorants. Back on land a common lizard scuttled across the footpath as we made our way around the edge of a cultivated field with plenty of flowers and brambles in the hedges. Past now the memorial to the hospital ship Glenart Castle which was torpedoed by the Germans on 26th February 1918, just off the coast. Kestrels were patrolling the precipitous cliffs as flocks of linnets twittered hither and thither around us. Very few butterflies were about although we did have the occasional gatekeeper.



BNA Branch Members at Hartland EB

After a long descent to a grassy area it was lunchtime and as we enjoyed our packed lunches another member caught up with us. He had mistakenly gone to Hartland Quay instead of Hartland Point. After much leg pulling about his navigational skills, he had the last laugh as he was the only person that day to see a peregrine there. Another member had a large net which he swished over the tall grasses and surrounding vegetation. The results

were tiny critters with long names like the green-eyed flower bee and striped slender robberfly. To everyone's relief we did not continue on the South West Coast path which went up a very steep hill but instead we crossed a level grassy field which led to a warm and sheltered lane. Here we hoped to see lots of butterflies, especially as it was the start of the big butterfly count (July 14th to August 6th) but all we had was one of the plume moths and a meadow brown. However a chiffchaff and long tailed tit were both observed with beaks full of food for their youngsters. The sun was really warm now as we continued past a farmyard with a large dung heap and several stone outbuildings but not a bird in sight.

Over the brow of the hill, past the heliport (its a 7 minute helicopter flight to Lundy) and down into the car park from where we had started several hours previously, to enjoy tea and cakes as the little cafe was now open.. We were very lucky with the weather as it can be very windy at Hartland Point and on the following day there were long periods of heavy rain. B.S

### **Baggy Point. Sunday 11th August 2024**

Often shrouded in mist, that prominent chunk of rugged rock protruding out into the Bristol Channel called Baggy Point was the destination for our August walk. Once in private ownership this headland together with its inland mix of scrub is now owned and managed by the National Trust and forms part of the North Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.



Bumblebee in field rose. JS.

The charred remains of a fire which scorched a large part of this area a few years ago had now all but disappeared as we made our way along the well worn cliff path. White trumpet like flowers of the hedge bindweed seemed to be in abundance and clumps of honeysuckle, fleabane and mallow among others, cheered us on our way. The well adapted rock samphire sprawled its way up over the cliff face. Passing a tamarisk hedge we came across the weathered remains of a huge whale bone, being part of a whale washed up on Croyde beach in 1915.

An interesting "first" for many of us was the discovery of some plant galls on a creeping thistle beside the path. They turned out to be caused by the thistle gall fly. It was a joy to see how the powerful forces of nature had recovered the landscape after the devastating fire. Wild flowers were in abundance helped by cattle and sheep grazing the area at certain times of the year, which keeps the scrub under control allowing the plant life to thrive. Some of our group were patiently trying to identify the numerous insects that had appeared as the thin sea mist started to disperse and the sun emerged between white tufts of cloud. Their patience was rewarded with the sighting of a grayling butterfly, possibly the sighting of the day.

This area is a popular holiday destination and we were not alone as runners and walkers frequently passed us by. Groups of cliff jumpers at various locations along the rocky shoreline below us plunged feet first into the water. This reduced our chances of spotting any grey seals in the numerous little bays. However, a little further along a group of 14 cormorants were perched on a rock with waves crashing around it.

A pleasant stiff breeze was blowing up across the cliffs and looking upwards above the skyline of the higher ground the “wind hovering” kestrel was busy looking for his midday meal. It seemed unconcerned at the numerous swallows skydiving it from all directions like the meteor shower that had been forecast for that night.

Arriving at the focal point our group settled down to consume their packed lunches with the bold outline of Lundy visible on the horizon. The colours of the sea seemed to be constantly changing and on its surface were fishing boats and a sail cruiser taking advantage of the stiff breeze. A couple of kayakers were effortlessly drifting with the current towards Morte Point at the other end of the next bay. On the sheer cliffs opposite us, some abseilers were enjoying their chosen recreation.



BNA Members at Baggy Point. JS.

Time now to make our way back along a wide stony path besides which grew a yellow splash of St John’s wort and yet more female common blue butterflies displaying their colours. The only task now was to consume a cream tea in the gardens of a cafe adjacent to the car park before heading home as house martins were busy feeding their nest bound youngsters.

JS

### **Torrington Common. Sunday 8th September 2024**

An area of wasteland called the Common was given to the people of Torrington in 1194. Today Torrington Common extends to some 365 acres to the North, West and South of the town and has about 20 miles of footpaths. It is protected by the Great Torrington Commons Act of 1889 and is looked after by 15 elected Conservators. Originally they controlled the quarrying and grazing, but that ceased and for the last 40 odd years various management techniques have been tried to prevent the area reverting back to scrub and woodland. One of the features of the Common is that the Conservators have laid out a tree trail of some 55 native trees, some dating back 5000 years, some to Roman times with others more recently introduced.



Gatekeeper EB

The weather forecast for the day of the walk had been dire, with weather warnings issued of heavy rain for the area. So it was with some trepidation that a surprisingly good number of members set out on the walk. It was



decided that initially we would follow the tree trail as we went past a very impressive stone wall which surrounds the Church and cemetery. Was this construction to keep people out or the occupants in?

We soon checked off a number of trees as we descended down to a fast flowing stream and proceeded along a foot path known as Barmaid's walk. A misty rain now started to fall, and although the trees gave some protection to a robin and grey squirrel, the wood pigeons sat on the telegraph wires looked pretty disconsolate.

Along Common Lake Path, we soon came across the lake which was covered in green algae, over the stream again, then the long trek up Alexander's Path to the car park. Along the way were scarlet pimpernel, tormentil, fox and cubs, self heal and some very nice juicy blackberries.

Although the heavy rain that had been forecast had yet to arrive, the very heavy mist was very wet and made going on into the afternoon a non starter. But then we had just had a two hour walk which was more than we could have hoped for. So well done to all those brave souls who turned up.

JS

### **Fungus foray at Godborough, 13<sup>th</sup> October 2024**

Godborough is a 30 acre site between Bideford and Abbotsham and is owned by Devon Birds, although it is run more as a general nature reserve than just for birds. It comprises of grazed pasture land with several wooded areas plus a couple of ponds.



Godborough RSPB Nature Reserve EB

There was an excellent turn out so it was just as well we had two leaders, Liz Crow and John Willatts. We started off on pasture land where there was nothing much to see until you got your eye in, then there were fungi everywhere with John and Liz being called from all directions to come and identify specimens. Whilst we wanted the names in English some unfortunately only have Latin names which is fine if you are a mycologist. Then we came across an unusual one. There was some debate as to whether it was a scarlet butterfly club or was it a yellow club. Subsequent investigation proved it to be the former, an entomopathogenic fungus which is one that grows on insects.

Having reached the highest part of the reserve, we then descended down through a more mature woodland area. A lovely amethyst deceiver was found and on a rotten piece of wood a collection of candle snuff fungi. Also found was red-cracked bolete and a couple of the 56 varieties of of milkcap where Liz showed us that the gills exude a watery milky fluid when rubbed. Nearby was buttercup with its greasy cap and dead molls fingers looking very menacing. Then a most unexpected find was that of orange ping pong. A most unusual looking specimen. Apparently it is an invasive species having come from Madagascar only five years ago. We resisted the temptaion to pick a large parasol mushroom.

A leisurely picnic lunch was overseen by a robin at the spot where previously a firecrest had been seen. Back up the steps past the Devon whitebeam then down to the start past crab apple and sweet chestnut trees.

Julie then invited us back for a home made cream tea with four different home made jams! Delicious.

Thanks go to Liz, John and Julie for a super day.

## **Taw & Exmoor Branch AGM - 9th November 2024**

Brian Sims - Chairman, secretary and treasurer of The Taw and Exmoor Branch held the AGM this year at The Royal North Devon Golf Club at Northam. In short, he has given a quick resume of the year.

We had 10 monthly outdoor trips where we have had up to 20 members attend and a successful five day Nature Holiday to Dorset on which 17 members came. Thank you all for your continuing support both at the outings and at our February indoor meeting and our annual dinner. There 40 names on the mailing list although one or two do not live locally.

The bank balance is just over £2,000, which is virtually the same as it was this time last year.

The branch doesn't run itself and various members help by carrying out certain jobs.

They are;

John Short who organises the outdoor trips,

Sally Blackmore who arranges the dinner - AGM (Annual General Meal combined with Annual General Meeting),

Julie Turner does the indoor meeting in February,

Endymion Beer, who looks after the branch web site and publicity,

Jane Glover, who has taken on the five day trip and ...

Elizabeth Fowler is on hand for BNA exhibitions.

My thanks to them all, especially as I am also pleased to announce that they have all agreed to carry on for another year.

However the time will come when we will have to retire, including the chairman, secretary and treasurer. So start thinking now as to who would like to do which job.

## **Annual bird watching Bonanza, Sunday December 15th**

As we amalgamated into fewer cars at the park and ride car park, the early morning mist swirled around us but as we proceeded along the smooth new tarmac of the reorganised link road, the windscreen wipers went from intermittent to steady to occasionally high speed. The mist going over Exmoor was so thick we could hardly see the wind turbines alongside the road. However, as we descended down towards Tiverton the mist cleared and by the time we got to Darts Farm the sun was out, so much so that several members of the group ended up wearing their sun glasses all day.

After meeting up with those who had driven direct to Darts Farm we walked around the area where a maize crop had been cleared but obviously there was a lot of spillage still on the ground as there was a huge gathering of rooks and jackdaws plus the occasional crow clearing things up. Around to the hide (a shelter really) with the sun glinting off the bare willow stems where there was a large number of Canada geese plus a few curlews, Brent geese and a lone little egret. A stonechat, Cetti's warbler, wren and a skylark all put in an appearance, plus the first of many sightings during the day of over wintering chiffchaffs. Due to the difficulty of finding a car parking space near the RSPB reserves at Goosemoor and Bowling Green Marsh, it was decided to walk over to them. What a wise decision that was, because on the way we came across an unusual bird, a bit of a cross between a snipe and a redshank. It turned out to be a rare annual winter visitor to the UK, long billed dowitcher, later further confirmed by it's call. Then we came across a couple of black tailed godwits probing the mud of the River Clyst. A quick look over Goosemoor but nothing of note and then around to the hide at Bowling Green Marsh.



Goosemoor BNA Members

We seated ourselves comfortably as we ate our packed lunches and viewed the spectacle in front of us. First up was a snipe, then a grey lag goose followed by an Egyptian goose. In between the vast numbers of wigeon were shoveler, teal, shelduck, some smart looking pintail and then a sharp eyed member spotted a scaup (normally a sea going duck). There were relatively few waders, mainly lapwing and redshank when we were treated to a marsh harrier doing several inspection flights over the large reed beds. If that wasn't good enough, a high speed peregrine put in an appearance!

On the way down to the Goat Walk flocks of long tailed tits were seen plus goldfinches and a greenfinch. The tide was only about half way in but we could pick out avocets and dunlin silhouetted against the reflection of Winter sun off the shiny mud. We did get better views of avocets from the observation platform overlooking the River Clyst.



Goosemoor by EB

Back past Bowling Green Marsh to a tall tree festooned in mistletoe where there has always been a mistle thrush guarding it's food supply. After much searching we eventually saw him, then a quick look over Goosemoor again and not one but two water rails out on the mud strutting their stuff for all to see, plus a male sparrowhawk which not only flew in but perched on a nearby fence long enough for all the photographers to get a good picture.

Back to Darts Farm as three mute swans flew overhead, making a total of 61 for the day. So yes it had been a bird watching bonanza day. Perfect! Needless to say we rediscovered the mist as we drove back over Exmoor.