

Beeson Farm Holiday Cottages

Wildlife Report

Owners: Robin and Veronica Cross

Beeson Farm is nestled on the edge of Beeson hamlet, with a stunning view from above the property down towards the sea. It is set in 2.5 acres of land, with two ponds and an acre of orchard which is grazed intermittently by sheep. The farm comprises a main Georgian farmhouse and an adjacent courtyard of Victorian barns which have been converted into holiday accommodation. Not all the barns have been converted and the unconverted provide nesting sites for a significant number of swallows that can be seen flying around the courtyard through the summer months.



View of Beeson House and Surrounding Countryside

As Beeson Farm is surrounded by farmland with a wood above it, there is a rich variety of wildlife to be seen. The wood supports a rookery which can easily be seen and heard, the birds start nesting by the end of February, fetching and carrying sticks to build their nests whilst chattering away to each other. Scan the surrounding fields from a vantage point and you may be lucky to see a fox, particularly in the summer months as the demand for food from the cubs' increases, forcing the vixen to hunt during the day for prey such as rabbits.

There are plenty of telltale signs of badger too, well-worn paths across the hedgerows and scuffs in the grassland where they have been rooting for earthworms and grubs.

A search in the long grass of the orchard (provided there are no sheep in the field!) may reveal a leveret; hares have been seen around the farm on a number of occasions. Remember to leave well alone and view from a distance.



The stone construction of the barns provides plenty of nooks and crannies for birds such as house sparrows to nest, together with roosting bats such as pipistrelle. Bat boxes have been erected to encourage these flying mammals.

Pied wagtails can often be seen strutting proudly around the courtyard with their unmistakable bobbing tail. The swallows are a spectacular sight to behold as they reel around the courtyard chattering happily. Take a closer look in the barns at their nests which are made from little balls of mud collected in the beaks of the adults.



Beeson Barns and Courtyard

High in the sky the sickle-shaped wing of the swifts can be heard along with their high-pitched evocative screams.



Small Pond at Beeson

Beeson Farm has two ponds; the top pond is smaller and has water lily, yellow flag iris, common water plantain, marsh marigold and water mint. It has duckweed covering the surface but this does not restrict the waterlife. Frogs and newts breed in the pond and damsel and dragonflies emerge from the pond to reach the last stage in their lifecycle. Common Blue, blue-tailed and black tail skimmer are but a few of the species that can be seen.



Blue Tailed Damselfly

A mix of shrubs along the back edge of the pond includes hawthorn, willow and dogwood. These are good cover for birds such as black cap and willow warbler. There is a buddleia in the corner, which when in flower is a good nectar source for butterflies.



Red Admiral Butterfly





Beeson Large Pond

The larger pond has been newly created and in time will become established with more plants. The surrounding area has been left to nature, bluebells, red campion, primroses and cow parsley can all be easily seen. A hedgerow lines the area with tree species including hazel, blackthorn, hawthorn and willow, with a large ash tree in the corner. Black caps with their chortley fruity song can be heard singing from within the scrub along with the easily identified chiffchaff (it sings its own name) and the willow warbler with its descending song. Other species such as blackbird, song thrush, dunnock, robin, goldfinch, bullfinch, chaffinch and wren can also be seen.

The hedges around the farm are a great habitat and are valuable for butterflies such as gatekeeper, meadow brown, large skipper, speckled wood, brimstone, green-veined white, orange-tip and holly blue. Mammals, including bank vole, wood mouse, weasel and hedgehog all benefit from a good hedgerow. Look for hazelnut shells with a neat hole and teeth marks, classic signs of a dormouse.

Wildflowers such as foxglove, primroses, lesser stitchwort, lesser celandine, red campion, lords-and-ladies, garlic mustard, violets, wood sage, wood sorrel, and many species of fern including hart's tongue, hard shield-fern, male-fern, Lady-fern, broad buckler and soft shield-fern can all be found in the hedges around the farm.



Red Campion and Primrose



A row of black alder have been planted as a screen for the car park, these tall distinctive trees have prominent catkins, the males being a reddish colour that are pendulous, whereas the females are dark brown and cone-like.

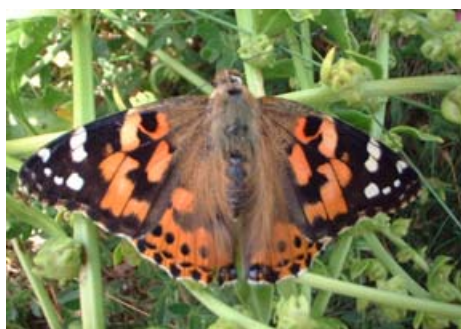
Above the ponds is an orchard, the majority of which was planted by the owners in 1998 and the remainder in 1999 and 2000. There is a mix of apple, pear and soft fruit trees, which are all tagged to identify the variety. The orchard is grazed by sheep to help manage the grassland surrounding the trees, which are all guarded to protect them from browsing sheep. No pesticides are used to treat the fruit and therefore there is plenty of insect life for birds such as the robin, wren and spotted flycatcher. In the winter months both redwing and fieldfare take advantage of the windfall apples.



Beeson Orchard & Grazing Sheep



Hazel



Painted Lady Butterfly

The field is hedge-lined with a mix of species including hazel, oak, hawthorn and ash. The base of the hedge supports all the common hedgerow flowers, red campion,

foxgloves, navelwort, stitchwort and cleavers. Both whitethroat and blackcap can be heard singing together with chiffchaff and dunnock. Butterflies were seen darting around - tortoiseshell, red admiral painted lady and common blue.

A bank outside the field also has a few apple trees planted and again typical wildflower species can be seen, with snowdrops covering part of the bank in early January. Violets and celandines are also in profusion. Honeysuckle weaves its way along the hedgerow, this is a good nectar source for insects and particularly moths which are attracted by its evening fragrance. Look out for a day-flying moth hovering from one flower to the next drinking nectar with its long tongue - the hummingbird hawkmoth.



Beeson Farm Species List

Trees and shrubs	Plants	Birds
Ash	Annual meadow grass	Blackbird
Beech	Blubell	Blackcap
Black alder	Bramble	Blue tit
Blackthorn	Burdock	Carrion crow
Budlehia	Cleavers	Chaffinch
Elder	Cocksfoot	Chiffchaff
Hawthorn	Common dog violet	Coal tit
Hazel	Cow parsley	Dunnock
Holly	Creeping buttercup	Garden warbler
Oak	Creeping Thistle	Goldfinch
Rowan	Enchanters nightshade	Great tit
Yew	Germander speedwell	Greenfinch
	Giant hogweed	House sparrow
Ferns	Greater plantain	Jackdaw
	Greater sedge	Jay
Hard fern	Ground Ivy	Linnet
Harts tongue fern	Herb Bennet	Long tail tit
Lady fern	Herb Robert	Mallard
Male fern	Honeysuckle	Marsh tit
Scaly male fern	Honeysuckle	Pied wagtail
	Ivy	Robin
Mammals	Lord and ladies	Rook
	Marsh marigold	Skylark
Badger	Nettles	Song thrush
Bank vole	Primrose	Stock dove
Common shrew	Red campion	Swallow
Daubentons bat	Snowdrop	Whitethroat
Field mouse	Timothy	Willow warbler
Fox	Water figwort	Wren
Hare	Water mint	
Lesser horseshoe bat	Yellow flag iris	Reptiles & amphibians
Pipistrelle bat	Yorkshire fog	
Rabbit		Common lizard
Roe deer		Frog
Wood mouse		Grass snake
		Palmate newt
		Slow worm
		Toad

NB This is not a comprehensive list



Wildlife Places of Interest Nearby

There are plenty of coastal walks which offer stunning views and idyllic little villages to visit. There are shingle beaches, high windswept cliffs and plenty of wildlife to see if you take your time to enjoy.

Wildlife sites close by to visit:

Beesands

OS Map: SX 819 410

The small village of Beesands sits behind a mile long stretch of shingle beach. There is a small freshwater lagoon 'widdecombe ley' which is an important wildlife site. There is a bird hide which is open to the public from which to watch the wildfowl and other wildlife that visits this ley.

Start Point

OS Map: SX 821 374

A perfect spot for watching the sun go down looking at the lighthouse and the stunning scenery. It is also a good place to watch the summer migrant birds such as willow warbler, chiffchaff and wheatear arriving. March and April is the best time for the migrants, however all year round interest includes peregrine, kestrel, raven and circl bunting. Look out on to the rocks known as Pear Tree Point and you may see a seal or two.

Slapton Ley National Nature Reserve

OS Map: SX 827 443

The largest freshwater lake in the southwest, it is separated from the sea by the narrow shingle ridge known as Slapton sands. There is plenty to see, cettis warbler is a resident warbler (listen out for its explosive song), reed and sedge warbler in the summer. Waterfowl include tufted duck, coot, golden eye, great crested grebe and mammals include badger, otter, dormouse and many species of bats. Slapton Bridge, which divides the two leys, is a great vantage point to watch the plethora of wildlife that the reserve supports.

The shingle ridge itself is home to a host of wildflowers including yellow horned poppy and viper bugloss and looks stunning in May and June. Guided walks run throughout the summer. Tel 01548 580685

Hallsands

OS Map: SX 817 388

Visit the ruined village of Hallsands, above the village by the row of old fishing cottages is a kittiwake colony, watch these noisy birds fly to and from their nesting site, look out for fulmars in this area too.



Prawle Point

OS map: SX 741 373

Coastal headland south of the village of East Prawle, great views and one of the best bird migration points. Spring and autumn are the best time. Cirl bunting breed in the area.

Wildlife sites further a field

Andrew's Wood- Devon Wildlife Trust reserve

OS map: SX 713 520

A wet woodland with acidic grassland. Has one of the largest populations of Dormice in Britain, woodland birds include wood warbler; flowers include marsh orchid and heath lobelia. There are plenty of butterflies to see in the grassland and woodland glades such as marbled white and silver washed fritillary.

Wembury - Voluntary Marine Conservation Area

OS map: SX 518 484

Four miles of coastline, rocky cliffs with nesting seabirds, rocky shore, slate reefs and wave cut platforms makes it a great site to spot marine plants and animals.

There is also a Marine Centre ideal for learning about the marine life, with regular rock pool rambles. For more information tel: 01752 862538

Dartmoor National Park

A day out to Dartmoor will give you a moorland experience, with blanket bogs, upland heath, oak woodlands (Wistmans Wood OS map SX 612 774 and Yarner Wood OS map SX 786 788) and the impressive granite tors. Wildlife to look for includes buzzard, dipper, salmon and skylark. For more information contact the High Moorland Visitor centre tel: 01822 890414



Beeson Farm Wildlife Enhancement Advice

Wildlife needs food and shelter: places where creatures can rest and nest. Gardens rich in wildlife have colour in all seasons, with plants blooming much of the year and seeds and fruit in the autumn and winter. A carefully planned structure should include plenty of variation in plant height and different habitat areas.

Ponds:

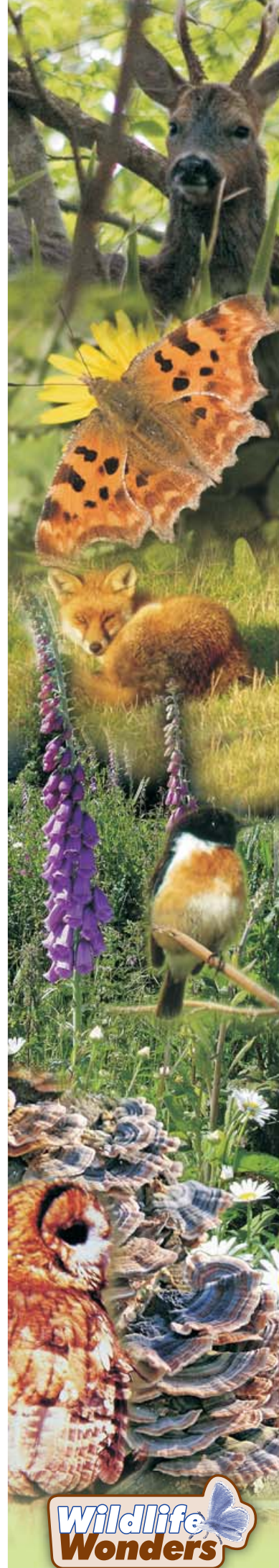
In time the larger pond will become home to frogs, toads, smooth newts, water beetles, dragonflies and damselflies and grass snakes. Ponds with fish support fewer species of aquatic animals for the simple reason that they are eaten by fish, so it is best not to introduce them.

An area of marsh habitat can be established at the shallower end by planting plugs of cuckooflower, one of many attractive native plants for pond margins or marshes (orange-tip butterflies lay eggs on it). Other plants include marsh-marigold, water avens, yellow flag iris, brooklime, ragged-robin, bogbean and water-plantain. Arrowhead is useful for emergent dragonflies and is also a specific food plant to some leaf beetles and also attracts hoverflies. This is a splendid plant for a largish pond.

The best way to keep a pond oxygenated and free of weed is to fill it with native pond plants. Always use British waterweeds and avoid non-native species such as swamp stonecrop or New Zealand pygmy weed (*Crassula helmsii* - also sold as *Tillea aquatica*), parrot's feather (*Myriophyllum aquaticum*) and floating pennywort (*Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*). These are very invasive and will cause you problems and can spread to your neighbours downstream.

The smaller pond needs some of the vegetation cleared, however this is better carried out in the autumn along with weeds and leaves to avoid de-oxygenation problems. Best practice is to clear one section of the pond at a time and leave the vegetation you remove at the side of the pond for a day or so to give any small aquatic animals trapped in it chance to return to the water. Surplus pond vegetation makes excellent compost!

Plants ideal for the sloping area above the pond include oxeye-daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*), this is a perennial which likes disturbed soils. An attractive plant with large, white, solitary, daisy-like flowers, it is a good nectar source for many insects from May to September. It will also tend to spread and just needs the dead stalks clearing at the end of flowering. Apple mint (*Mentha rotundifolia*), like all the other mints is a good cover as it is a vigorously-spreading plant. The flowers of the mint family are an excellent nectar source for butterflies, bees and other invertebrates.



Walls and fences

The farm has many walls and fences, which are very good for nesting birds, foraging and hibernating insects and small mammals. Any new trellises to be erected should be attached about 10-15cm from the wall using spacing blocks. Climbers should be planted approx. 10cm away from the trellises, out of the dry zone. The space between trellis and wall will be ideal for nesting birds such as blackbird and dunnock and, on the ground, will provide a relatively safe green corridor for small mammals such as bank vole, wood mouse and shrews.

As well as providing cover for nesting birds, wild honeysuckle and ivy offer hibernation sites for butterflies such as brimstone and are good food plants for hawkmoths (honeysuckle) whereas hoverflies, small tortoiseshells, commas, peacocks and other butterflies feed on ivy flowers very late in the season.

Nestboxes

Use an open fronted nest-box behind a climbing plant to attract nesting robins; one could be placed within the climber at the front of the house.

Nest boxes for birds should be carefully erected, but never on a south facing wall or fence in full sun. A couple of swift boxes erected on the barns could also help to encourage swifts to nest; a calling tape should be used to attract the swifts: they come to investigate and hopefully stay to use the boxes. House sparrow terrace boxes could also be erected around the buildings and a barn owl box sited at the back of the unconverted barn may be used by this threatened species. In the hedgerows dormouse boxes could be erected, ideally around 5 feet from the ground attached to hazel.

Bird boxes should be cleaned out in the autumn when there's no risk of disturbing the occupants. Clean them out with boiling water so that disease and parasites are killed.



Useful addresses

Ash Tree Nursery, Bowden, Nr Dartmouth TQ6 0LR

Tel: 01803 712437

Mobile nos: 07792 525070/07980 922316

Supplier of native plants.

The Really Wild Nursery, 19 Hoopers Way, Torrington Devon EX38 7NS.

Tel: 01805 624739. Website: www.kathryn-moore.co.uk

Supplier of native plants.

Flora Locale website for locally sourced plants near you.

www.floralocale.com

BBC website for useful information on nestboxes for both birds and mammals along with other wildlife tips.

www.bbc.co.uk/science and nature

Envisage Wildcare: mail-order conservation supplies, everything under the sun! 01793 724848, Freepost NAT18592, Swindon SN2 2BR



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