

# Nature's Calendar

# Spring



Spring can arrive early in the South Hams due to its mild climate. Life starts to stir in February and by March is generally in full swing. Watch the landscape emerge from its winter slumber and burst into colour almost before your eyes.

There is plenty to see, either visiting specific locations or travelling along the lanes, just take the time to watch, listen and smell.

## March

As the days grow longer and warmer the hedgerows really begin to come to life. Ramsons (wild garlic) with their luscious leaves and white flowers are a splendour to behold, the smell as you brush past them can be intoxicating. On south facing banks in particular, primroses can be found in large numbers and look out for the deep purple hues of violets. Birds begin to start nesting, watch them busily collecting nesting material. By the end of March the summer migrant birds begin crossing the

channel on the last leg of their arduous journey from Africa, sand martins are some of the first to arrive along with chiffchaff and willow warbler.

## April

The swallows and house martins are next to arrive, by the end of April they are here in large numbers. By late April, fledgling birds leave their nests and can be seen feeding with their parents – blackbirds and thrushes are some of the first and ducklings can be seen on the water.



**Left** - Willow warbler; **From top** - Gosling; stitchwort; red campion; **Far top right** - stonechat



bluebells

## Wildlife Hot Spots for spring

Hot Spots

### Start Point OS SX 821 374

Spectacular views and a great place to visit for migrant birds such as willow warbler, chiffchaff and wheatear arriving along with the swallows and martins. March and April is the best time, the carpet of bluebells which cover the slopes, is worth the walk.

### Gallants Bower – Dartmouth OS SX 882 502

This 1640's Royalist hill fort shows splendid swathes of bluebells in the woodland and open grassy areas.

### River Avon at Avon Mill OS SX 731 484

Walk along the old railway line next to the river, bluebells and ramsons are glorious in spring along with the birdsong.

By now the banks and hedgerows are at their best – look out for the hedgerow tricolour: red, white and blue – the red campion, the fine white daisy-like flower of the stitchwort and the vivid indigo-blue of the bluebells. Dotted near house entrances and spilling out into the hedgerows is the stunning magenta of honesty.

## May

Now's the time to watch the blue tits and great tits feeding their young. Look out for the sickle shape of the first swifts high in the sky or listen out for their evocative screams. Taller plants begin to dominate the hedgerows, cow parsley with its white flowers and the pink of the foxglove make a stark contrast. The orchids are bursting forth – early purple and pyramidal orchids can be seen along the road verges. Take care when stopping on the lanes if you want to take a closer look. Dragonflies and damselflies begin to emerge from even the smallest of ponds. The common blue damselfly and black tailed skimmer are some of the most common. Fox cubs begin to venture out of their earth to play in the sun at this time whilst the vixen is off hunting.

**From left** - juvenile great tit; early purple orchids; long tail tit with nesting material

Photos by Jon Morris, Jayne Morris, Clare Morris and David Hackford

