

Kitley House Hotel

Wildlife Report

Owner: Andrew Huckerby



Kitley House Hotel

Kitley House Hotel is a five hundred year old historic house set in six hundred acres of unspoiled pasture and woodlands. It is situated on the edge of Yealmpton in a managed estate. The hotel itself overlooks the woodland and to the side, wet meadows, reed bed and the lake. The diversity of habitats means that there is a wealth of wildlife to enjoy.



View of Lake



Channel and Woodland in Background

A morning coffee sat out on the veranda offers you a stunning view of the lake and woodland and is accompanied by a cacophony of birdsong from the woodland. The common species such as blackbird, robin, wren and song thrush can all be heard along with the curt 'chip' of the greater spotted woodpecker or the 'yaffle' of the green woodpecker. Green woodpeckers will also come to feed



on ants and other grubs on the lawn. The descending call of the willow warbler is evocative through the summer along with the fruity chortley song of the blackcap or the easily identified chiffchaff, (it sings its own name!). In the summer swallows are flying over the reed bed and lake catching flies along with both house and sand martins. Try to distinguish the three species from each other; swallows have a blue/black plumage and long tail streamers. Sand and house martins are similar in silhouette with short tails but differ in that house martins are larger and have a white rump with blue/black plumage rather than

brown like the sand martins. A flash of blue flying low over the water is the unmistakable vibrant colour of the kingfisher often accompanied by its high-pitched piping call. Scan the lake edges for the motionless silhouette of the heron poised ready to catch a fish. In the trees on the far side of the lake little egrets congregate and roost, numbers of this relatively recent immigrant have reached over forty.



Little Egret

On the lake there is a resident pair of mute swans who have had mixed breeding success, plus plenty of mallards, coot and moorhen. Listen out for the pig-like call of the elusive water rail. Other birds attracted to the reed bed and wet meadow area through the summer months are sedge and reed warbler with their happy scratchy chattering call. There are plenty of nesting opportunities as well as all year round feed in the wet meadow, scrub areas and woodland for many birds including blue, great, coal and marsh tit, as well as other species such as chaffinch, greenfinch and goldfinch.



Juvenile Great Tit

Right: Willow warbler



The lake is filled by a small river that runs along the back edge of the wet meadow, and is topped up with salt water at the far end at high tide. Bass and grey mullet come up into the lake to feed, along with brown trout which can easily be seen in the slower moving pools of the river. In the summer there are many different species of dragonfly and damselfly to be seen. Common blue, blue tailed and beautiful demoiselle damselflies along with large red and small red darter, golden ringed and emperor dragonflies. Dragonflies are distinguished from damselflies in that at rest they hold their wings out and they are have a more robust body, whereas damselflies have much thinner,



daintier bodies and at rest fold their wings up together. Scrapes have been created, to increase the diversity of habitats. These along with the wet meadow, stream and lake are excellent habitat for the many insects and therefore the ideal home for reptiles and amphibians including frogs, toads, grass snakes and newts. There are plenty of tadpoles to be seen in the shallower pools and look out for the young grass snakes which are no thicker than a pencil slithering through the undergrowth.



River that Feeds Lake



Blue Tailed Damselflies (Mating)

Listen for the chirps of the grasshoppers and crickets in the longer vegetation, on closer inspection they are easily distinguished from each other by the length of their antennae: grasshoppers have short stubby ones whereas the antennae of crickets are long and curl over their body. Look out for the great green bush cricket which is lime green and at maturity reaches 8 cm in length.

There is a circular walk from the hotel along the driveway and out of the grounds and down the road to the River Yealm and back through the woodland, this can be rewarded with many a delight. In the evenings through the summer watch the bats flying around the trees and even the outside lights of the hotel, catching moths and other insects. The grounds and house are home to several different species of roosting bats including pipistrelle, lesser horseshoe and daubentons. Twilight is a good time to look out for a hunting barn owl, as it quarters the open rough grassland along the driveway and neighbouring fields. Listen for the calls of the tawny owl, the 'kewick' and 'twooh' are generally from two separate birds, which become particularly vocal in October when they pair up for the following breeding season. Little owls are found on the estate too, particularly around the coach house at the entrance to the sweeping driveway to the hotel.



Barn Owl

Turn right out of the coach house entrance and right again down the road until you reach the River Yealm. The road is hedge lined and walled and together with the banks and open areas around the house and driveway, represent a valuable habitat for butterflies such as gatekeeper, meadow brown, large skipper, speckled wood, brimstone, ringlet, green-veined white, orange-tip and holly blue.





Ringlet



Gatekeeper

Before the bridge turn right into the woodland that runs parallel to the banks of the River Yealm back towards Kitley. This linear woodland is the old railway line from Plymouth to Yealmpton. Before enveloping yourself in the woodland, it is worth looking over the bridge into the water at the brown trout that are often seen in the deep pools of the river. A grey wagtail with its grey and lemon yellow plumage is a frequent sight along the river and even a kingfisher sat on an overhanging branch is not uncommon.

There is a mix of species in the woodland. This includes alder near to the river as it likes damp conditions. Deeper in the wood, ash, oak, sycamore and beech dominate. The ground vegetation is a mix of greater wood sedge, bluebells, herb robert, wood sorrel and ivy. In places there are tunnels of laurel where there is little or no ground flora but listen out for parties of long tail tits feeding on insects along with the high pitched tinkerling of the goldcrests high in the tops.



Goldcrest

Along the road and amongst the woodland areas, look for animal tracks, paths and holes; there are well worn paths crossing the wooded areas which are likely to be from badgers which are very routine in where they forage creating distinct pathways. Look out too for their latrines (loos), badgers are very clean animals, take a look to see what they have been eating, it is really obvious when blackberries are on the menu! Foxes will also hunt along lane hedges and in the woodlands within the grounds around Kitley and there are plenty of sites for an earth. The easiest way of telling whether a fox is around is to look for faeces. It looks similar to dog but has a wisp at the end and always has fur mixed in it. Another tell-tale sign is the distinct musky smell that the dog fox puts about to mark his presence and territory.



Fox Faeces



In the areas of the woodland where there is plenty of hazel, look out for hazelnut shells with a neat hole and teeth marks, as this is one of the signs that dormice are present. Along the way the path meanders in out of the woodland following the riverbank offering open views of the Yealm estuary where oystercatcher, redshank, curlew, whimbrel and dunlin can be seen amongst others feeding on the mudflats. The vegetation in the more open areas along the path include sea beet, sea campion and sea radish along with the more traditional woodland margin plants of red campion, herb bennet and garlic mustard.



Views of the Yealm Estuary

Along the path heading back to the hotel there are many large oak and sweet chestnut trees with knarled and decaying limbs, these are excellent habitat for invertebrates which live in the cracks and fissures within a tree. Look out for the large menacing yellow and brown body of a hornet, you may see them flying in and out holes within these knarled trees. Look along the trunks of these large trees as they are littered with holes of varying sizes, the larger ones being those made by greater spotted woodpecker and the smaller perhaps by nuthatch. Scan the very tops of the trees to see these birds, as a woodpecker flies from tree to tree it is easily recognised by its very distinctive undulating flight pattern.



Hornet



Sweet Chestnut

Through the autumn months, mushrooms and toadstools are a plenty. Earth and puff balls can be found on the ground and fungus such as candle snuff and dead mans fingers growing on dead and rotten branches o the ground. Look out for



the large plate like structures of the bracket fungus and the black charcoal-like 'burnt cakes' of the fungus 'king alfred's cakes'.

The path continues passed the lakeside, along the waters edge look for prominent features such as large stones and fallen branches as there may be otter spraint (poo). A frequent sprainting site is along the path between the lake and the river above the weir at the end near to the cottage. The Spraints are black and tarry when fresh and a washed out grey/green colour when older, on closer inspection one can often see fish scales and bones in them. For the more daring, give it a sniff as it has a sweet grassy/fishy smell which is not unpleasant, if it offends then it is probably a mink scat which has a foul odour!



Otter Spraint



Species List

Trees and shrubs	Plants	Birds
Ash	Annual meadow grass	Barn owl
Beech	Bluebell	Blackbird
Black Alder	Bramble	Blackcap
Blackthorn	Burdock	Blue tit
Buddleia	Cleavers	Buzzard
Elder	Cocksfoot	Carrion crow
Field Maple	Ground Ivy	Chaffinch
Guelder rose	Giant hogweed	Chiffchaff
Hawthorn	Common dog violet	Coal tit
Hazel	Cow parsley	Coot
Holly	Creeping buttercup	Dunnock
Oak	Creeping Thistle	Fieldfare
Rowan	Enchanters nightshade	Garden warbler
Scots pine	Honeysuckle	Goldfinch
Silver Birch	Greater plantain	Great tit
Spindle	Greater sedge	Greater spotted woodpecker
Sweet chestnut	Herb Robert	Green woodpecker
Wild cherry	Honeysuckle	Greenfinch
Willow	Herb Bennet	Grey wagtail
Yew	Germander speedwell	House martin
	Ivy	House sparrow
Ferns	Lord and ladies	Jackdaw
	Marsh marigold	Jay
Hard fern	Nettles	Kestrel
Harts tongue fern	Primrose	Kingfisher
Lady fern	Red campion	Linnet
Male fern	Sea radish	Little grebe
Scaly male fern	Snowdrop	Little owl
	Timothy	Long tail tit
Mammals	Water figwort	Mallard
	Water mint	Marsh tit
Badger	Yellow flag iris	Mute Swan
Bank vole	Yorkshire fog	Mistle thrush
Common shrew		Moorhen
Daubentons bat	Reptile & amphibians	Pied wagtail
Field mouse		Raven
Fox	Common lizard	Redwing
Hare	Frog	Robin
Lesser horseshoe bat	Grass snake	Rook



Pipistrelle bat	Palmate newt	Skylark	
Otter	Slow worm	Song thrush	
Rabbit	Toad	Sparrowhawk	
Roe deer		Stock dove	
Wood mouse		Swallow	
		Swift	
		Tawny owl	
		Whitethroat	
		Willow warbler	
		Wren	
		Yellow hammer	

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:

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

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 and 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.

Wildlife sites further afield to visit:

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's bugloss and looks stunning in May and June. Guided walks run throughout the summer. Tel 01548 580685

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.

Hallsands

OS Map: SX 817 388

Above the ruined village of Hallsands, by the row of old fishing cottages is a kittiwake colony, watch these noisy birds fly to and from their nesting site and 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. Circl bunting breed in the area.



Kitley House Hotel Wildlife Enhancement Advice

Wildlife needs food and shelter: places where creatures can rest and nest, which the grounds of Kitley provide many. The formal gardens can also be rich in wildlife and 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.

Walls and fences

Within the grounds of Kitley there are 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 10-15 cm from the wall using spacing blocks. Climbers should be planted approx. 10 cm 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.

Nest boxes

Use an open fronted nest box behind a climbing plant to attract nesting robins or spotted flycatcher, one could be placed within a climber at the side of the hotel.

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 house could 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 building. In the woodland boxes could be scattered through the trees with varying sized holes to accommodate the plethora of bird life and dormouse boxes could be erected with in the woodland dominated by hazel, ideally the boxes should be placed around 5 feet from the ground attached to hazel stools.

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 wild plants and flowers.

The Really Wild Nursery, 19 Hoopers Way, Torrington Devon EX38 7NS. Tel:
01805 624739. Website: www.kathryn-moore.co.uk
Supplier of native wild plants and flowers.

Flora Locale website for locally sourced plants near you.
www.floralocale.com

BBC website for useful information on nest boxes 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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Scrapes have been created amongst the wet meadow area for damsel and dragonflies and wading birds.

Listen to reed and sedge warblers in the reedbed through the summer. Water rail with their pig-like call can be heard all year round.

Kitley House, gardens and lawn.

The trees lining the lake are home to roosting little egret, Kingfisher, coot, moorhen, mallard, pochard, tufted duck and golden eye can all be seen on and around the lake.

Green woodpeckers come in search of ants on the lawn area, watch for quartering barn owls over the longer grass and bats flying around at dusk.

Otter spraints can be found along the lake bank by the wier particularly.

Purple line denotes the walk, where it is dotted is the route but with no land marks showing (Follow the road).

Woodland birds include nuthatch, treecreeper, greater spotted woodpecker, jay and sparrowhawk. Look at the veteran oaks and sweet chestnut with their knarls and holes.

Tidal mudflats are excellent feeding grounds at low tide for wading birds; oystercatcher, whimbrel, curlew, dunlin, redshank and common sandpiper.

Listen to the goldcrests calling in the treetops and parties of long tail tits and blue tits feeding on insects and small caterpillars.

River Yealm

