

The Exmoor National Park Authority  
biodiversity action plan Important Species



**The Dormouse** This small orange-brown mouse is about 70 to 80mm long and has a long hairy tail rather like a bush baby. The tail is nearly as long as the body and has adapted to help it balance. Dormice make their nests from shredded honeysuckle bark woven into a ball which they often surround with layers of leaves. They are nocturnal so you are unlikely to see one. They spend the day asleep in their nests. The female has four to five babies each year and feeds on flowers, pollen, fruit, nuts and berries (especially hazelnuts). During the winter the dormouse hibernates.

**What is its habitat?** The dormouse lives in woodland, scrub and hedgerows where many plants produce nuts and berries. It spends much of its time running about in the shrub layer and does not run at ground level or cross roads.

**Where does it live on Exmoor?** Luxborough ash and maple woodlands, woodlands at Horner, in the Avill valley and in mixed hedges and copses in the Devon part of the National Park.

**Why is it in danger?** In many parts of England and Wales old woods and hedgerows have been destroyed to make room to grow more crops.  
• On Exmoor farming change has been limited by steep combs. Even on Exmoor too much laying and flailing of hedges destroys the thick scrubby hedges loved by dormice.

**What is being done to help?**  
• Exmoor Natural History Society are recording where dormice live and are setting up dormouse boxes.  
• Exmoor National Park Authority are finding out where there are dormice on Exmoor and making sure the sites are protected. They are going to encourage farmers to make dormouse-friendly hedges.

**Did you know?** The dormouse leaves a neat, round hole in the shell when it eats a hazelnut. It's the best way for us to know the dormouse has been about.



**Whitebeam** Whitebeams are unusual, attractive and interesting trees. New varieties began from crosses between the common whitebeam and rowan or wild service trees but these now breed true and are regarded as a proper species. These trees are called whitebeams because the underside of the leaves is white. They produce orange/brown or red/scarlet berries in autumn like the rowan. The trees are very rare and many are only found on Exmoor and nearby. They are therefore especially precious.

**What is its habitat?** They have adapted to live in rocky woodland in places where there has been little change over the years. A few live inland on woodland edges and in hedgebanks.

**Where does it live on Exmoor?** Most live on or near the Exmoor coast at Culbone, Watersmeet, Woody Bay and in the Heddon Valley.

**Why are they in danger?**  
• Numbers are small and they do not produce berry seeds frequently.  
• The trees can be shaded out by larger species, damaged by animals browsing on the leaves or lost in landslips.

**What is being done to help?** • Surveys have been made of the existing trees.  
• Berries are being collected which are then grown on to plant in suitable woodland.

**Did you know?** The Devon Whitebeam has recently been found in Somerset. You can see it in Timberscombe Wood, owned by Exmoor National Park Authority.



**Lungwort Lichens** There are four kinds of this lichen that live on Exmoor. They grow on the bark of native trees.

**What is its habitat?** They live on the branches of native trees such as ash, oak, hazel and willow that are found in sheltered moist river valleys. They need unpolluted air and light, and prefer mature trees. They have adapted to grow on old oak trees because the bark of young ones is too acidic, but can be seen on young ash or sycamore trees because their bark is less acidic.

**Where does it live on Exmoor?** You can find lungwort in the valleys of the Horner, Barle, Bray and Haddeo and in Nettlecombe and Pixton Parks.

**Why is it in danger?**  
• It spreads slowly from tree to tree and cannot easily grow in new woodlands.  
• Many trees have been felled and there are few old trees left.  
• Lichen-carrying trees have been shaded by lack of management and also by nearby conifers, rhododendrons and beech.  
• There is air pollution especially from drifting fertilisers and pesticides.  
• Cattle and sheep rub themselves on lichen-carrying trees destroying the plant.  
• People don't know very much about lungwort.

**What is being done to help?**  
• Trees are being surveyed before felling to protect those with lungwort lichens.  
• Woodland around trees with lungwort lichen is being thinned to let the light in.  
• Rhododendrons around lungwort trees are being cleared.  
• Young ash trees are being encouraged to grow along the river valleys to provide sites for lungwort.

**Did you know?** Lungwort got its name because it looks rather like lung tissue and because of that it was used in the past to treat tuberculosis.



**The Ballerina Wax-cap**

The ballerina wax-cap is a fungus. That's another name for toadstool! It has a pink cap and a white stalk and appears during the autumn, fruiting irregularly.

**What is its habitat?** The wax-cap grows on grassland that has not been improved. This means that the ground has not been ploughed and no artificial fertilisers have been added. In the past it grew in farm fields used for grazing.

**Where does it grow on Exmoor?** The Weather Station field at Nettlecombe, Dunster Deer Park and at Pinkery.

**Why is it in danger?**  
• Because so much grassland has been improved and artificial fertilisers added to get a better yield.

**What is being done to help?**  
• People are finding out where the Ballerina wax-cap and other wax-caps are growing on Exmoor.  
• They are discovering more about the way it grows and why it likes grassland.  
• They are looking after the places where it grows and making sure they are not ploughed, fertilised or neglected.

**Did you know?** It's called the ballerina wax-cap because it looks like a ballet dancer.



**The Nightjar** The nightjar flies from Africa to Exmoor in June. The female lays its egg on the ground. The bird has a huge mouth surrounded by bristles to help it feed on insects (adaptation). During the last 30 years the number of nightjars has dropped by 50%.

**What is its habitat?** It likes heathland with trees but has adapted to live in clearings in conifer plantations.

**Where does it live on Exmoor?** Croydon Hill and Selworthy Hill.

**Why is it in danger?** Many of its favourite heathland sites have been taken over by farming or forestry.  
• Other areas have been invaded by thick scrub and by rhododendron so that they are not open enough for the birds.  
• Two-thirds of the birds live in forestry plantations where the land is only suitable for about 5 years after the trees have been felled before the new crop of trees has grown too bushy.

**What is being done to help?**  
• Five heathland sites are being specially managed to create the right habitat for the nightjar.  
• Forestry plans have been drawn up for felling and re-planting so that there will always be open areas suitable for the birds.  
• Bracken and gorse is being controlled and small areas are being burnt to maintain the heathland habitats.

**Did you know?** 45 minutes after sunset the male nightjar begins to clap its wings and calls out with a churring sound.



**The Heath Fritillary Butterfly**

**June** - Butterflies emerge from the chrysalis and lay eggs on cow-wheat (semi-parasite on whortleberry).  
**July** - Caterpillars hatch and feed on the cow-wheat. They may feed on foxgloves as well. **Winter** - Caterpillars hibernate. **May** - Caterpillars wake up and eat and eat and then form a chrysalis.

**What is its habitat?** The butterflies prefer coppiced woodland. Today there is little coppicing so they have to adapt to live on the heathland at the edge of former coppice where bracken provides shelter and warmth.

**Where do they live on Exmoor?** On woodland fringes like those at Alcombe, Dunkery, Hawkcombe and Haddon Hill.

**Why are they in danger?**  
• Heathland has been taken over by bracken which, with conifers, have shaded former sunny areas where the butterflies bred, while older heathland stops cow-wheat germinating.  
• Caterpillars may die in cold wet springs and bad weather in the flight period in summer can affect breeding.  
• Where there are small numbers the butterflies seem more likely to die out.

**What is being done to help?**  
• Small areas of heathland in the right areas are being burnt to encourage the growth of cow-wheat. Cutting and spraying the bracken in patches stops it getting too thick.  
• People are doing research to try to find out more about the needs of these butterflies.

**Did you know?** Heath fritillary butterflies were once called 'woodman's followers' because they appeared in coppiced areas soon after the trees were cut.





The word **BIODIVERSITY** comes from a Greek word **BIOZ** which means **LIFE** and from a Latin word **diversio** which means **VARIETY**. So you can see that biodiversity means the variety of life – all the thousands of different kinds of plants and animals, birds and insects that live in different places all over the world.

All these different kinds of living creatures are called **species**. Each one has a special home or **habitat** where living conditions are just right for them. When these living conditions change the species may not be able to survive. Once dinosaurs lived on the earth. They disappeared because the conditions in which they lived changed.

### A little bit of change goes a long way!

These days human beings are altering the earth in all sorts of different ways • cutting down rain forests • putting up lots of new houses • spreading chemicals on the land • pulling up hedges.

Large and small changes like these have damaged **habitats** and lots of living creatures have disappeared. They have become **extinct**.

**WHAT ARE WE DOING TO STOP THIS?**

A world meeting was held at **Rio de Janeiro** in South America in 1992 to discuss the way that we are spoiling the earth. Many countries agreed to take action to stop spoiling the earth and prevent plants and animals becoming extinct. The United Kingdom was one of the countries that signed and a national biodiversity plan was prepared. After this, organisations throughout the UK produced their own plans for biodiversity to protect their nationally important species and habitats. Exmoor's first Biodiversity Action Plan was produced by **Exmoor National Park Authority and English Nature** in 2000. Over the years there have been lots of changes on Exmoor:

- farmers have ploughed the moorland
- machines have taken over from humans
- people no longer work the ancient woodlands
- conifers have been planted on moorland



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