

Soar Mill Cove Luxury Hotel

Wildlife Report

Owner: Keith Makepeace



View of Hotel and Gardens

Soar Mill Cove hotel is set in a spectacular coombe, facing a sheltered sandy bay and surrounded by 2000 acres of National Trust land. The hotel has the most amazing view from the dinning and sitting rooms and in inclement weather is a marvellous spot to soak up the atmosphere of the wilds outside. With summer comes a bounty of bird and insect life, on sunny days the butterflies happily fly around visiting flowers nearby. Look out for red admiral, tortoiseshell, peacock and painted lady and the less common clouded yellow and dark green fritillary.



Views from the Hotel





Garden Shrubs

Right: Agapanthus



The grounds are well manicured with flower filled borders and shrubs offering nesting sites for the many birds that can be seen within the grounds.

Wherever you sit within the grounds you can either hear or see a robin singing, they are extremely friendly, presumably having been fed by the gardener as he tends the grounds. Pied wagtails are also a common sight with their black and white plumage strutting proudly around the grounds with their unmistakable bobbing tail. Song thrushes come to find a worm or two from the neat lawns. Each guest room has its own patio garden where blue tits can be found nesting in one of the pillars and robins regularly nest in the bank. There are swallows nesting in the laundry room and they can be regularly seen drinking from the outside swimming pool.



Robin



Song Thrush

Amongst the well-groomed lawns and grounds are also patches of rough ground, such as the bank alongside the tennis court. This has been left to go natural and supports many species of plants including yarrow, red campion, herb robert, nettle, hogweed, greater plantain and dock. In late summer when the plants such as dock and nettle have gone to seed, watch mixed flocks of finches feeding, such as greenfinch, chaffinch, linnets and goldfinches. Beyond the grounds is a field of rough grassland with patches of gorse, which are a common place to see linnets and stonechats. The male stonechat is distinguished from the female by its dark brown head but both have a warm orange/brown breast. Look out for them sitting on the bracken stalks.

The rough grassland beyond the hotel is also a good hunting for kestrel, this smallish bird of prey with reddish brown plumage can be seen hovering, fanning



its tail out to use as a rudder. The cliffs running along the coastline are home to the peregrine falcon, it hunts other birds particularly pigeons and in a stooping dive can reach speeds of up to 200 km/h. Listen for the noisy 'keik, keik' as they call to each other, particularly when the young are on the wing.



Rough Grasses and Wildflower Bank

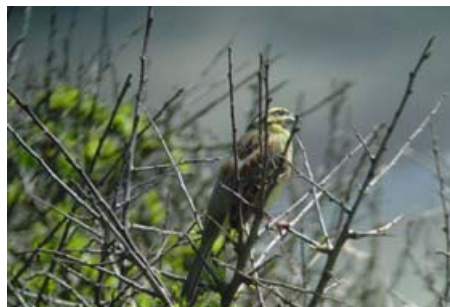


Stonechat

The path leading from the hotel down to the sea follows a freshwater stream. The vegetation growing alongside the ditch includes foals watercress, hemlock water dropwort, agrimony, hedge woundwort, bramble and elder. In the summer months look out for dragonflies and damselflies flying around the area. Damselflies are daintier and fold their wings behind them at rest whereas dragonflies are much more robust and hold their wings out at rest. Look out for the beautiful demoiselle which could be mistaken for a butterfly at first glance due to its fluttering flight, it is in fact a damselfly. The male has a blue iridescent body with dark navy wings whereas the female has a green iridescent body and copper wings. Look out for emperor and golden ringed dragonfly as well. Butterflies can be seen flying to and from the flowers here such as the bright yellow of the fleabane, bird's foot trefoil and hawksbeard. Butterflies to look out for include gatekeeper, meadow brown, ringlet and green veined white. The cliff tops and surrounding fields and hedgerows are home to birds such as yellow hammer - listen for its call of 'little bit of bread and no cheeze'. A similar bird is the ciril bunting, it has a shortened more jangly call compared with the yellow hammer and its plumage is not such a striking yellow. The blackthorn and gorse scrub is good habitat for these birds.



Yellow Hammer



Ciril Bunting

Up around Bolberry Down, the gorse and blackthorn scrub are home to the rare and reclusive dartford warbler with its slate blue/grey plumage and a vine red



breast. Listen out for whitethroats singing amongst the scrub. Their song is a scratchy melodic call and the easily identified chiffchaff (it sings its own name) can also be heard. Check the fence posts along the way as the stonechats like to perch on these to scan the area. Along the paths are clusters of yarrow, with its dark green feathery leaves and flat umbrella like white flowers. In patches there are drifts of pink sea thrift and the spinach-like leaves of sea beet, and the sea radish with yellow flowers and large oval seed pods. Common toadflax has yellow-lipped flowers along a straight stem with a whorl of leaves. The daisy-like flowers to be seen are sea mayweed often alongside and the taller plants with the upturned green flower florets of sea carrots which turn convex as they come into flower.



Dartford Warbler



Sea Thrift



Sea Mayweed

Many different species of butterfly can be seen on the walks around the hotel such as common species such as red admiral, tortoiseshell and peacock. Look out for the bright yellow of the clouded yellow, edged in black and the scalloped wings of the comma along with smaller butterflies; the bright orange of the small copper and the eye-catching blue of the common blue. Look for the similarity between the gatekeeper with its two white spots within the black spot or the meadow brown which is slightly bigger and only has one white spot within its black spot. There are several day flying moths such as the burnet and cinnabar with their crimson and black spots and stripes respectively. The hummingbird hawkmoth may also be seen hovering at the flowers of honeysuckle and bindweed, drinking the nectar with its long tongue.



Comma



Along the paths and amongst the scrub keep an eye out for animal tracks, paths and holes; there are plenty of well worn paths throughout, these are created by badgers which are very routine in where they forage creating distinct pathways. They also use latrines (loos) - try and guess what they have been eating. It is really obvious when blackberries are on the menu! Foxes are frequent visitors to the many rabbit warrens along the coastline, the easiest way of telling if 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 telltale sign is the distinct musky smell that the dog fox puts about to mark his presence and territory. Through the summer it is not uncommon to see a fox during the day as they are out hunting to feed their ever-hungry cubs. Sika deer are a regular sight and their well worn paths can be seen leading to the patch of scrub to the right as you look out from the hotel. Hares are also a relatively common sighting, quite different from rabbits with their larger frame and longer ears that are tipped with black.



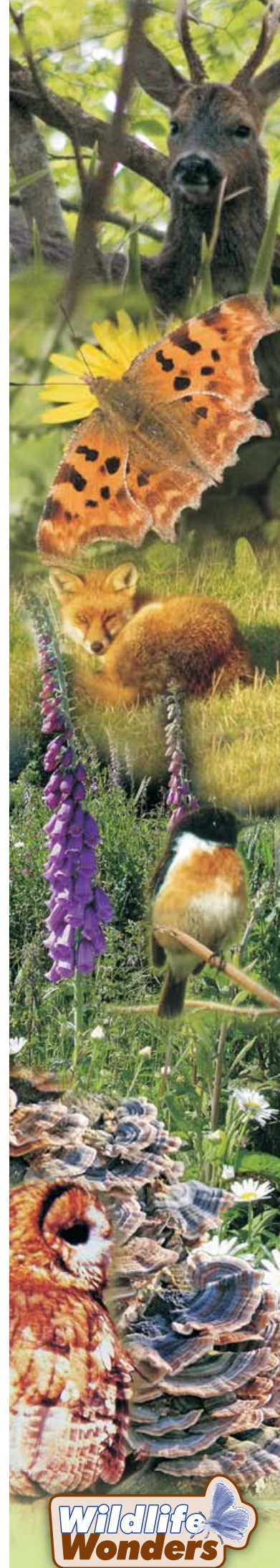
Red Fox

Heading for the beach is well rewarded the stunning little cove, the rocks leading down are covered in rock samphire, wild thyme and sea thrift. Skylarks and meadow pipits are birds that can be regularly seen, both fly high up in the sky and then drop like a parachute to the ground. Watch them feeding on small crickets, grasshoppers and other insects. Green woodpecker can be heard yaffling and may be seen on the ground hopping along in search of ants.



Rock Samphire
Left: View down to Soar Mill Cove

On the beach, take your time to have a good look as there are over a hundred different types of seaweeds and algae to be found, such as lithothamnia, a red and pink encrusted algae. Six species of crab: shore, edible, porcelain, velvet, hermit and furrowed can be found along with spiny and cushion starfish, blenny and gobbie fish, purple topshells, dogwelks, periwinkles, and limpets, and much more. As you search in the rock pools, you may see



flitting around the rocks the well-camouflaged rock pipits which feed on the small insects and sand hoppers.

Scour the tide line for treasures such as mermaid's purses, there are several different shapes. Ray or skate egg cases have long curved spikes at each corner whereas dogfish egg cases have curling tendrils which are used to secure them to seaweeds. You may be lucky enough to find scallops, razors and even cowrie shells. Grey seals can be seen all around this coastline and in the past one pupped on the beach nearby at Hope Cove.



Purple Topshell, Limpet and Lithothamnium

Out on the open sea look out for guillemots and razorbills, these cigar shaped birds can be seen bobbing on top of the sea with fulmars and kittiwakes flying low over the water. Look out for gannets diving into the sea to catch fish, watch how they fold their wings in close before entering the water. If you are very lucky you may even see a basking shark or bottle nosed dolphin.



Cowrie and Scallop Shells



Species List

Trees and shrubs	Plants	Birds
Ash	Annual meadow grass	Blackbird
Blackthorn	Bluebell	Blackcap
Buddleia	Bramble	Blue tit
Elder	Burdock	Buzzard
Field Maple	Cleavers	Carrion crow
Guelder rose	Cocksfoot	Chaffinch
Hawthorn	Common dog violet	Chiffchaff
Hazel	Cow parsley	Cirl Bunting
Holly	Creeping buttercup	Coal tit
Oak	Creeping Thistle	Dunnock
Holly	Enchanters nightshade	Fieldfare
Oak	Fleabane	Goldfinch
Rowan	Germander speedwell	Great tit
Willow	Giant hogweed	Greater spotted woodpecker
	Greater plantain	Green woodpecker
Ferns	Greater sedge	Greenfinch
	Ground Ivy	Grey wagtail
Hard fern	Hemlock water dropwort	House martin
Harts tongue fern	Herb Bennet	House sparrow
Lady fern	Herb Robert	Jackdaw
Male fern	Honeysuckle	Jay
Scaly male fern	Ivy	Kestrel
	Lord and ladies	Linnet
Mammals	Marsh marigold	Long tail tit
	Meadow Vetchling	Meadow pipit
Badger	Nettle	Mistle thrush
Bank vole	Primrose	Peregrine
Common shrew	Red campion	Pied wagtail
Daubentons bat	Rock Samphire	Raven
Field mouse	Sea Campion	Redwing
Fox	Sea Thrift	Robin
Hare	Snowdrop	Rook
Lesser horseshoe bat	Timothy	Skylark
Pipistrelle bat	Tufted Vetch	Song thrush
Rabbit	Water figwort	Sparrowhawk
Sika Deer	Water mint	Stock dove
Wood Mouse	Yellow flag iris	Stonechat
	Yorkshire fog	Swallow
		Swift
		Whitethroat



	Reptile & amphibians	Willow warbler	
		Wren	
	Common lizard	Yellow hammer	
	Frog		
	Grass snake		
	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:

South West Coastal Path

The coastal path can be picked up by walking along the path from the hotel down towards the sea. Turn right and follow the path up to Bolberry down which is home to the Dartford Warbler among other bird species.

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 this 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

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 afield to visit:

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 which 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.



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.



Soar Mill Cove Hotel 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

Ponds are very good for attracting wildlife and would therefore add to the grounds if one were created. An area of marsh habitat can be established at the shallow 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.

Walls and fences

There are many walls and fences around the grounds of the hotel, 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. Nest boxes for birds should be carefully erected, but never on a south facing wall or fence in full sun. House sparrow terrace boxes could also be erected around the buildings. Bird boxes should be cleaned out in the autumn when there is 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 wildflowers and plants.

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

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

Supplier of native wildflowers and 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](http://www.bbc.co.uk/science_and_nature)

Envisage Wildcare: mail-order conservation supplies, everything under the sun!

01793 724848, Freepost NAT18592, Swindon SN2 2BR



There are plenty of butterflies visiting the plants and flowers such as small copper, common blue, clouded yellow and comma. Listen out for skylark and meadow pipit high in the sky and look out for the sleek silhouette of a peregrine.

Kestrels can be seen hovering above the grassland in search of small mammals.

Look for stonechats sat on the fence posts as you walk to and from the beach. Flocks of linnets and charms of goldfinch can be seen feeding on the thistles.

Listen out for the 'Barwk barwk' of the raven and look out for rock pipits on the rocky outcrops along the coastline.

Rock samphire, thrift and wild thyme all grow on the rocky outcrops along the coast.

In the rock pools look for purple topshells, limpets and dogwelks as well as bladder wrack and sea lettuce seaweeds.

Look out for grey seals either swimming or hauled up, basking on the rocks.

Look for the sika deer and their well worn paths into the scrub. A fox may well visit to feast on rabbits.

The stream runs down to the beach, its flora consists of hemlock water dropwort, agrimony, fools water cress and bramble. Beautiful deimoselles can be seen along its length.

Rough grassland - plenty of grasshoppers and crickets in the summer months.

Gorse and blackthorn scrub are good habitat for stonechat, linnet, yellow hammer and cirl bunting.

Watch the swallows drinking from the outdoor pool.

Hotel gardens

Tennis court

Look for the robins around the gardens along with the pied wagtails and song thrush. On the bank by the tennis court look for feeding linnets and goldfinches on the seed heads of the dock and thistles.

Hotel

Soar Mill Cove Luxury Hotel Nature Trail