

Fowlescombe Farm

Wildlife Report

Owners: Richard and Barbara Barker



Fowlescombe Farm

Fowlescombe Farm is a mixed organic farm set in 191 hectares and lies in its own valley not far from the village of Ugborough. The farm has stunning views of the South Devon countryside and is a wildlife haven as it is farmed in an environmentally sensitive way with wildlife habitat being a priority.

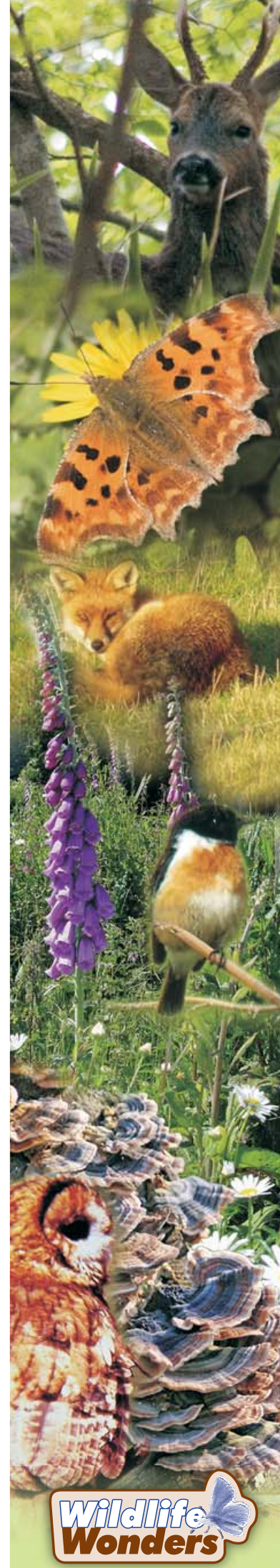


Trees in the Mist



Restoration of Parkland

The ancient field pattern and network of hedges on the farm is still substantially present and re-instatement of hedgerows and restoration of open parkland trees means it is being reverted back to how it once was. There are large areas of mature woodland as well as newly planted woodlands. Part of the hectareage is down to arable, which provides winter feed for the pedigree



Aberdeen Angus and Devon Ruby Red cattle and also several rare breeds of sheep, goats and chickens. The grazing pastures are a mix of unimproved and semi-improved grassland with a rich diversity of flora. An ancient track runs for almost 2 kilometres through the main valley from the restored gate lodge at the entrance to Fowlescombe. The tree-lined avenue runs down past the farmhouse and stone barns and the ivy-clad, Grade II listed manor-house ruins and continues along the side of the steep coombe down to a tiny ruined gatehouse on the old Witchcombe road to Modbury.

Fowlescombe is the central part of what was once an important mediaeval estate in the catchment area of the Erme. The manor house was built in 1537 but was abandoned over a century ago and now the ruins are home to bats which roost in the ivy-clad remains and small gaps in the stone work. There is a lesser horseshoe roost in one of the chimney breasts of the ruin and a pipistrelle roost in the farmhouse. Other species of bat recorded at Fowlescombe include serotine, natterer's, whiskered, greater horseshoe and brown long eared. On a balmy evening watch the bats flying around, see if you can see differences in size and flight pattern as this denotes the different species. The fields are important feeding grounds particularly for lesser and greater horseshoe bats which feed on beetles that are found on the dung of the grazing cattle. The cattle are farmed organically, which is beneficial to bats as their food prey is affected by the use of wormers.



Mansion Ruins

The ivy growing on the ruin is also a good habitat for nesting birds such as wren, blackbird and song thrush. Song thrush and blackbird are very vocal, listen to their songs which are melodious; song thrush repeats notes and trills whereas blackbird is a much more fluid song. Listen out too for mistle thrush otherwise known as the storm cock, which will sit at the top of a tree and sing, warning of inclement weather. Through the winter months these birds can be seen feeding on the berries of the ivy. Look out for a little wren scuttling in and out of the vegetation searching for insects, it has a wonderfully loud beautiful song for such a small bird. Wood pigeon can also be heard with its characteristic call, 'I do like cornflakes, I do' along with collared dove who sings 'Who are you, who are you'!



Song Thrush

Tawny owls also reside in the ruin. Listen for their call, they are particularly vocal in October when they are pairing up for the following spring. It is often the female that calls first with a short 'kewick' answered by a 'twooh' from the male. Barn owls are also around and have been successful in rearing young in the



workshop where the implements are kept. Barn owl boxes have also been erected in the barns further afield. Look out for a barn owl quartering the fields in search of prey. The areas which have been newly planted with trees are ideal hunting habitat for barn owls as the grass beneath the trees has a tall structure and is ideal for small mammals. Once the trees are well established and shade the grasses, the habitat becomes less suitable over time. However there is still plenty of hunting ground along the hedgerow margins, unimproved grassland areas and wet flushes by the streams.



Barn Owl in Workshop

Around the farm buildings, visitor centre and cottages there are many house sparrows which nest in the holes in the stonework. Listen out for their noisy chattering and see if you can work out the hierarchy, the males have a black bib - the higher the rank the bigger the bib! Through the summer months, the hirundines - swallows, swifts and house martins - can all be seen high in the sky feeding on the plethora of insect life. Swallows nest in the stables, watch them fly in and out with their happy chatter call. House martins nest under the eaves of the main house and lodge. Notice their white rump and short tail compared to the longer tail of the swallows.



Juvenile Swallows

A newly planted orchard has been created behind the farmhouse which in time will become a valuable habitat. Look out for bullfinches picking at the buds on the trees, they are generally seen in pairs, the male has a beautiful rose-red breast, whereas the female is a dusky salmon pink. Look out for their white rump as they fly. Birds such as blue, great and coal tit can also easily be seen along with chaffinch, greenfinch, goldfinch, robin, wren and blackbird



Juvenile Great Tit

There are several ponds throughout the farm which are fed by springs, streams and run-off from the surrounding fields. The ponds are abundant with wildlife; the vegetation consists of common reed, yellow flag iris, reed mace, common sedge, water figwort and marsh marigold. The ponds are excellent habitat for insects, diving beetles and freshwater hogs and shrimps, dragonfly and damselfly larvae. These food items make the ponds the ideal home for reptiles



and amphibians including frogs, toads, grass snakes and palmate newts. At night shine a torch on the water and see if you can see any movement.

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 flat at rest. Damselflies such as blue-tailed, common blue and small and large red can be seen flying around along with dragonflies such as golden ringed, emperor, black tailed skimmer and southern hawker.



One of the Many Ponds



Toads (Mating)



Blue Tailed Damselflies (Mating)

In the fields adjacent to the streams are marshy areas consisting of tufted sedge grass, lady's smock and ragged robin. Southern marsh orchid and early purple orchid can be found in the field below the newly restored bridge leading over to the mansion. Woodcock and snipe can often be seen in the damp wet flushes in Coombe Great Meadow in particular. Grey wagtail can be seen along the banks of the stream, look out for with its grey and yellow plumage and characteristic bobbing tail. In the summer look out for the beautiful demoiselle damselfly fluttering about the area. The male has a blue iridescent body and navy wings whereas the female has a green iridescent body and copper wings.



Snipe



Lady's Smock



Southern Marsh Orchid



In some of the fields large patches of gorse scrub have developed, these are ideal for birds such as stonechat and flocks of linnets and charms of goldfinches. Yellow hammer can easily be seen, listen out for its distinctive and easily recognisable call - 'a little bit of bread and no cheeze!' and listen out for whitethroat with its scratchy but melodic call. The arable land on the farm is excellent for species such as skylark and meadow pipit and seed-eating birds such as linnets, stonechat, greenfinch and chaffinch. These birds use a combination of various habitats which are found around the farm. Arable management includes wildflower margins and beetle banks and cereals are sown in spring rather than winter. The benefit of this is that stubbles are retained over the winter period and so provide a food source for both birds and small mammals. In the spring listen for the evocative call of the skylark which sing high up in the sky above the grassland and arable fields. They are hard to spot at first but then watch how they drop out of the sky down to the ground like a parachute.



Yellow Hammer

There are about 4 hectares of mature broad-leaved trees dotted around the farm and the disused quarry sites have been reclaimed by nature. The woodland flora consists of snowdrops, ramson's (wild garlic) with its strong garlic smell, dog's mercury, bluebells and primroses along with ferns such as broad buckler, male, lady's and harts tongue fern. There are also many epiphytic ferns growing on the branches of the trees as well as numerous different types of lichen covering the bark. Look at the different types of lichen growing on the tree branches. There are three different types of lichen; usnea's are stringy, cladonia's have fruiting bodies like chalice cups and parmeliads are generally flat with curly edges.



Coombe Quarry



Ramson's (Wild Garlic)

There are many different types of fungus to be seen growing on dead and fallen branches. Look out for jew's ear growing on the elder trees and king alfred cakes (it looks like burnt cakes!) growing on ash. Other types of fungus to be found on the decaying branches include dead man's fingers, candle snuff



and bracket fungus. Puff and earth balls can also be found growing on the woodland floor.



Jew's Ear



King Alfred's Cake

The woodlands and quarry sites are home to badgers. There are plenty of tell-tail signs of badgers: well worn paths across the hedgerows and scuffs in the grassland where they have been nuzzling for earthworms and other grubs. Look out for their setts which are really obvious with large mounds of earth outside several holes such as those in Kennel Quarry. Badgers are very clean animals and use a latrine (loo), see if you can tell what they have been eating, it is really obvious when blackberries and sloes are on the menu! Kennel quarry also has a fox earth which is one large hole, other evidence of fox can also be seen around the area such as piles of feathers which on close inspection have been chewed rather than plucked which indicates a fox kill, look for their faeces as well. Fox faeces is similar to dog but has a wisp at the end and always contains fur. Scan the fields for a fox, particularly through the summer months when the vixen will be out hunting in the day, making the most of the glut of young rabbits. You may also be rewarded with a sighting of a weasel or stoat which both feed on young rabbits and small mammals. Stoats are larger than their cousin the weasel and have a black tip to their tail. Hares are much more common than rabbits on the farm particularly in the arable fields and margins, a search in the long grass may be rewarded by a leveret, which lies motionless. If you are lucky enough to see one remember to leave well alone and view from a distance. Roe deer are occasionally seen grazing in the fields as well as in the woods, if seen look out for the white heart-shaped rump as they turn tail and run.



Fox Faeces



Fox



Listen to the birdsong as you walk through the woodland as it is a symphony to one's ears. Through the summer months the bird population increases with the summer migrants. Listen out for the fruity chortley song of the blackcap, the descending call of the willow warbler or the easily identified call of the chiffchaff (it sings its own name!). Birds to be seen all year round include blue, great and coal tit, blackbird, robin, greenfinch, chaffinch and nuthatch. Goldcrest's can be heard high in the treetops and look out for a tree creeper climbing up the trunks of trees in search of insects.



Blackcap (Male)

The woodlands are also home to greater spotted woodpecker, listen for its curt 'chip', or the unmistakable 'yaffle' of the green woodpecker. The harsh squawk of the jay is a common sound particularly in the autumn when they are busily caching acorns for the winter. Through the winter months large parties of long tail tits are a regular sight flying one after another from tree to tree as if in a marching procession. Listen out for the 'barwk, barwk' of ravens as they fly overhead or the mewing of the buzzards as they soar high on a thermal or notice them perched in the trees. Look for the characteristic flap, flap, glide of the sparrowhawk or the hovering of a kestrel over the farmland as it hunts for small mammals. As the summer migrants leave in the autumn they are replaced by the winter migrants - redwing and fieldfare.



Goldcrest



Willow Warbler



Long Tail Tit



Buzzard



Listen out for the 'tsee, tsee' call of redwing and you may see them fly over in mixed flocks with fieldfare looking for feeding grounds. They are often seen in the surrounding fields, particularly East and West Down.

The hedgerows and banks around Fowlescombe are a mix of species including hawthorn, hazel, blackthorn, field maple, dogwood, sycamore, ash and oak. The management of the hedgerows is carried out through the winter months using the traditional method of hand cutting and laying rather than flailing with a tractor. This not only keeps a traditional rural skill alive but it also increases the longevity and density of the hedgerow and produces a better habitat for the wildlife that lives in it. The hedgerow bottoms in the spring and summer are full of wildflowers such as foxglove, primrose, greater and lesser stitchwort, lesser celandine, red campion, lords-and-ladies, herb robert, garlic mustard, violet and wood sage.



Hedge Laying

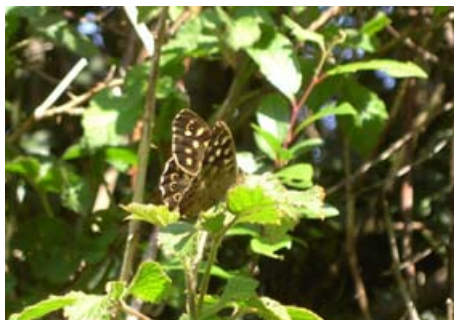


Celandines and Primroses



Greater Stitchwort

Butterflies are fewer in numbers in the woodland and carr areas due to the shaded nature, however the edges of these areas, plus the extensive hedgerows and unimproved grassland are much more fruitful. Gatekeeper, meadow brown, speckled wood, ringlet, common blue, painted lady and clouded yellow along with the more common species such as red admiral, peacock and tortoiseshell are but some of the species to be seen.



Speckled Wood



Gatekeeper



Species List

Trees	Plants	Birds
Ash	Annual meadow grass	Barn Owl
Beech	Bluebell	Blackbird
Black Alder	Bramble	Blackcap
Blackthorn	Bugle	Blue tit
Buddleia	Burdock	Bullfinch
Elder	Celandine	Buzzard
Field Maple	Cleavers	Carrion crow
Guelder rose	Cocksfoot	Chaffinch
Hawthorn	Common Century	Chiffchaff
Hazel	Common dog violet	Collared Dove
Holly	Common Groundsel	Coal tit
Oak	Cow parsley	Cuckoo
Rowan	Creeping buttercup	Dipper
Scots pine	Creeping Thistle	Duncock
Silver Birch	Cuckoo flower	Fieldfare
Spindle	Dog's Mercury	Garden Warbler
Sweet chestnut	Early purple Orchid	Goldcrest
Wild cherry	Enchanters nightshade	Goldfinch
Willow	Forget-me-not	Grey Wagtail
	Garlic Mustard	Great tit
Mammals	Germander speedwell	Greenfinch
	Giant hogweed	Greater Spotted Woodpecker
Badger	Greater plantain	Green Woodpecker
Bank vole	Greater sedge	Grey Heron
Common shrew	Greater Spleenwort	Grey Partridge
Dormouse	Ground Elder	House Martin
Field mouse	Ground Ivy	House sparrow
Fox	Hairy Plantain	Jackdaw
Greater Horseshoe	Herb Bennet	Jay
Grey Long Eared Bat	Herb Robert	Kestrel
Hare	Honeysuckle	Lapwing
Lesser Horseshoe	Ivy	Linnet
Pipistrelle bat	Ivy Leafed Speedwell	Little Owl
Rabbit	Lord and ladies	Long tail tit
Roe Deer	Marsh marigold	Mallard
Wood mouse	Navelwort	Mistle Thrush
	Nettles	Moorhen
Reptile and amphibians	Nipplewort	Nuthatch
	Oxford Ragwort	Peregrine
Common lizard	Oxslips	Pheasant
Frog	Pignut	Pied Wagtail



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:

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

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

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.

Wildlife sites further a field 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 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

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-

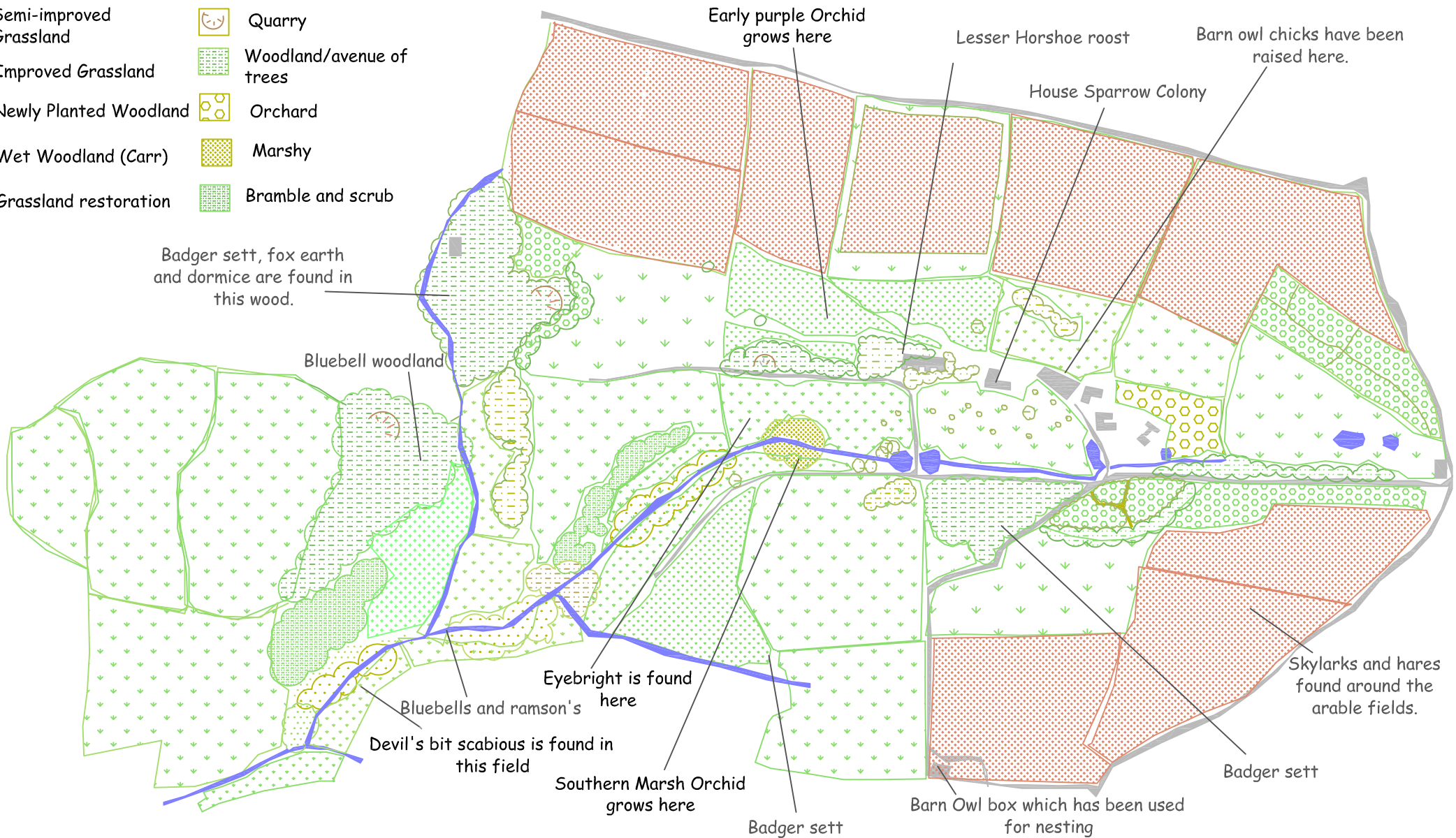
OS map: SX 741 373

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. Circl bunting breed in the area.



Fowlescombe Farm

- | | | | |
|---|-------------------------|---|--------------------------|
|  | Rotational Arable/grass |  | Tussock Sedge Grass |
|  | Unimproved Grassland |  | Gorse Scrub |
|  | Semi-improved Grassland |  | Quarry |
|  | Improved Grassland |  | Woodland/avenue of trees |
|  | Newly Planted Woodland |  | Orchard |
|  | Wet Woodland (Carr) |  | Marshy |
|  | Grassland restoration |  | Bramble and scrub |



Fowlescombe Farm

The Rotational arable/grassland fields are home to meadow pipit and skylark and rare arable weeds such as corn spurrey.

Look for barn owl quartering the fields and newly planted woodland areas.

Listen out for Tawny owls within the woodland areas and around the ruin and watch bats flying around in the evenings.

Look for badger setts and fox earths within the woodland and hedgerows.

Woodland of mixed broadleaved species - ash, oak, sycamore hazel and field maple. Birds include nuthatch, treecreeper and greater spotted woodpecker.

Look for beautiful demoiselle, common blue and blue tailed damselflies along with emperor and golden ringed dragonfly.

The wet flushes next to the stream consist of tussock sedge grass and in the unimproved grassland look for eyebright, ragged robin, lady's smock and early purple and southern marsh orchids.

Look for raptors in the sky, kestrel hovering over the grassland, the 'flap, flap, glide' of a sparrowhawk as well as buzzards soaring on the thermals.

