

The high, damp, peat-covered tops of Exmoor's moorlands are special places. Not only do these they provide a habitat for many plants and animals but by storing water like a giant sponge, they can help reduce the risk of flooding downstream.



The moorland across the Exe Plain includes the mires at Exe head, which are the source of the River Exe; and Blackpitts, an area of former peat-cutting. The use of these moorlands for peat-cutting and grazing has led to them becoming dried out and losing many of their characteristic species due to the drainage ditches and peat-cuttings in the peat.

Mire restoration began in this area in 2001 with some small scale blocking of the ditches at Blackpitts and Exehead. The wooden blocks put in at Blackpitts by the gate can still be seen today. Most of the ditch blocking however took place in 2007 and the site has changed significantly since then. Before any blocking took place there were only a couple of permanent water pools on site. Today there are over 200, and these are now home to a fantastic range of wildlife habitats: The largest upland population of dragonflies in Somerset can now be found here along with breeding wetland birds such as snipe and ducks; lots of frogs (which are food for adders and otters), and not forgetting the red deer and Exmoor ponies which come to the site to drink. The range and extent of Mire plants has also extended across the moors, and visitors in early summer will be rewarded with a carpet of cotton grasses and multi-coloured Sphagnum mosses.

Where to explore Exmoor's Mires:

The moorland at Exe Head has been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest by Natural England because of its national wildlife value. It is owned by Exmoor National Park Authority and managed for conservation and agriculture by a tenant farmer. It is Open Access Land and you are free to roam where you like but please respect the moorland by observing the Countryside code when visiting.

1. Snipe
2. Red deer
3. Exmoor ponies
4. Short eared owl
5. Moorland cattle
6. Soft rush (round stems)
7. Purple moor grass leaves (tall and green/straw coloured in winter)
8. Wood and peat block to re-wet cutting or ditch
9. Teal
10. Billberry or whortleberry
11. Bog cotton grass (flowers)
12. Meadow pipit
13. Black darter dragonfly
14. Skylark
15. Peat (old cutting face)
16. Purple moor grass (flowers)
17. Bog cotton grass leaves (reddish)
18. Whirligig beetles
19. Sundew
20. Common frog
21. Green sphagnum moss



22. Hares tail cotton grass leaves (green and narrow)
23. Heath milkwort
24. Red sphagnum moss
25. Adder
26. Water skater
27. Field vole
28. Dragonfly larvae
29. Hares tail cotton grass (flowers)
30. Tormentil
31. Brown sphagnum moss
32. Common lizard
33. Bog asphodel
34. Orange sphagnum moss
35. Cross leaved heath