

EXMOOR

National Park

Woodlands

Pocket Guide

Discover
Exmoor's
magical
woodlands



exmoor
dream • discover • explore

Wild Woods?

The woodlands today on Exmoor are the result of hundreds of years of management.

Until the early twentieth century, many of Exmoor's oak woodlands were used for two main products: charcoal, which was mostly used for lime slaking and iron smelting, and bark which was used for leather tanning.



Today there is still a lot of woodland management going on although the work is more mechanised and there are different end uses for timber products. Broadleaved trees are harvested for flooring, gates, furniture, timber frames and firewood, whilst conifers



are used to make fencing, garden furniture and woodchip. Exmoor National Park Authority use timber from their own woodlands to manufacture gates, bridges and signs for use around the National Park.



Rich in Wildlife

From the smallest wood ant to the biggest Red deer stag, Exmoor's woodlands provide a home for a surprising variety of species.

Birds such as pied flycatchers, wood warblers and redstarts live in the woodlands during the summer. Some like the great spotted woodpecker and tawny owls live in the woodlands all year round. Wooded river valleys like the Barle support kingfishers, grey wagtails and dippers.



The clean, moist air sustains a large range of liverworts, lichens, mosses and ferns. Old ash trees in particular can be excellent habitats for some of the rare lichen species, such as *Lobaria* and *Usnea* lichens.

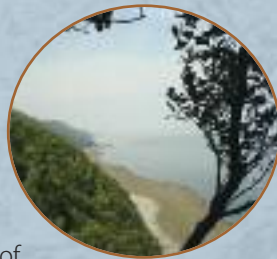
There are high numbers of ancient trees, some dating back hundreds of years. These are important habitats for many species of birds, mammals, invertebrates, plants and fungi.



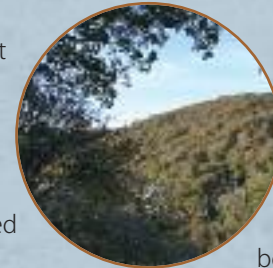
Continued management of Exmoor's woodlands ensures vibrant habitats for many types of wildlife.

Some of the Best Woodlands to Visit on Exmoor

There are lots of ways to enjoy Exmoor's woodlands. From an early morning Spring walk to hear the "dawn chorus", a summer picnic in a dappled glade or an autumn stroll as the leaves change colour and the fungi appear on the forest floor - below are some of our favourite places to explore.



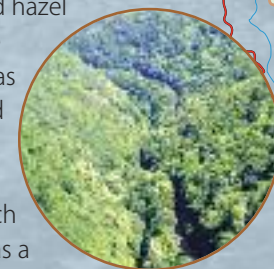
1. Horner Wood is owned by the National Trust and is a National Nature Reserve (NNR) which highlights its high importance for nature conservation. It is mostly oak woodland which was formerly managed as "wood pasture". This was a system where livestock were allowed to graze amongst the woodland and the trees were "pollarded" by cutting back their limbs to above the grazing height. Some of the pollarded oaks in Horner Wood today are around 500 years old.



4. Coastal Woodlands. These are thought to be the longest stretch of unbroken coastal woodlands in England. They are growing on steep, unstable slopes that experience occasional landslips and are buffeted by the wind and the rain from the Atlantic. Many of the trees have a twisted, knarled appearance because they have grown with these local environmental conditions throughout their lives.

2. Watersmeet Woodlands

lie in the deep river valleys above Lynmouth and are mostly made up of native oak, ash, birch and hazel trees. Much of the woodland area was formerly coppiced to provide wood for charcoal manufacture which in turn was used as a source of fuel in lime kilns. They are also home to some extremely rare species of whitebeam trees which only live in this part of the world.



5. Croydon Hill and Nutcombe Bottom

- the Forestry Commission and the Crown Estate manage these large blocks of conifers with many open, heathy areas on the hill tops that offer excellent views in many directions.



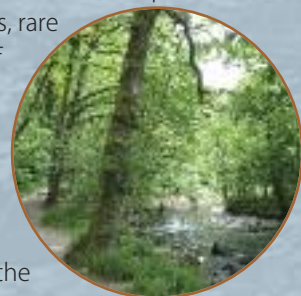
3. Hawkcombe Wood was designated a National Nature Reserve in 2004. Coppicing has been re-established by Exmoor National Park Authority to help produce a patchwork of lighter glades that are ideal in summer for invertebrates such as woodland butterflies.



6. Barle Valley Woodlands. Many of these are Sites of Special Scientific Interest which highlights their high nature conservation status for species such as

wood warblers and pied flycatchers, rare *lobaria* lichens and a large range of woodland plants. Most of the Barle Valley woodlands were formerly managed by coppicing to produce an annual crop of fuelwood and tan bark.

7. Burrige Wood. Located on the side of a valley above the winding River Barle and a great place to visit from Dulverton. It is mostly made up of sessile oak woodland.



Exmoor's Woodlands - a precious resource for people and wildlife

The clean, moist and usually mild coastal air that flows through Exmoor's landscape of deep river valleys, steep coastal cliffs and moorland, have helped to create some very special woodlands. Often dominated by sessile oak, these nationally important "Atlantic" woodlands are rich in wildlife and history and are one of the elements that make Exmoor National Park such a special place.

But our woodlands are not untouched and "wild" in the truest sense, they have developed through centuries of human use and management. Many of the plants and animals that live in the woods depend on the continued seasonal cycles of management to keep them thriving as healthy and dynamic habitats.

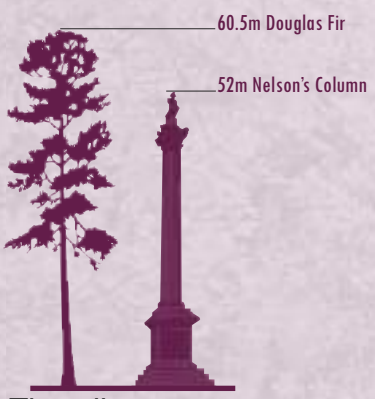
Exmoor National Park has over 9300 hectares of woodland including some truly important sites and some very rare species of trees.



Wedge-tailed Woodpecker

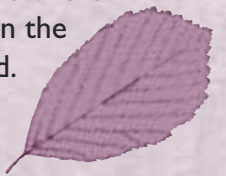
Woods in the Heddon Valley on the North Devon coast

Wood you believe it?



The tallest tree in England is at Nutcombe Bottom near Dunster; a 60m high Douglas fir.

There are four species of whitebeam tree that grow on Exmoor and nowhere else in the world.



13.5% of the land cover in Exmoor National Park is woodland - that's 9,375 hectares (ha).

Exmoor National Park Authority own 569 hectares of woodland which along with the 1092ha managed by Forest Enterprise means that 17% of the woodland on Exmoor is in public ownership.

About 64% of Exmoor's woodlands are broadleaved and the remaining 36% are conifer.



There are more trees on Exmoor today than there were a hundred years ago.

Oh The Deadwood Stage is...



Great for wildlife! We leave around 10% of any felled woodland to decay naturally as it's good for beetles and makes excellent homes for

wildlife including birds, bats, small mammals and invertebrates, as well as lower plants like fungi, lichens, mosses and ferns.

Worth The Long Trip

Pied flycatchers migrate over 2000 miles from their over-wintering sites in West Africa to arrive in Exmoor's woodlands from April and spend the summer here.



The longest stretch of continuous coastal woodland in England is on Exmoor's north coast and is about eight miles long.

Where to find out more

Some popular guides to Britain's trees and woodlands include:

- History of the Countryside by Oliver Rackham
- British Tree Guide: A Photographic Guide to Every Common Species - Collins Complete Guide
- Britain's Remarkable Trees by Thomas Pakenham

Useful Websites:

- Forestry Commission: forestry.gov.uk
- Natural England: naturalengland.org.uk
- Woodland Trust: woodlandtrust.org.uk
- Nature's Calendar website - phenology: naturescalendar.org.uk
- Ancient Tree Forum: ancient-tree-forum.org.uk
- National Trust: nationaltrust.org.uk
- Crown Estate near Minehead: dunsterestate.co.uk

Exmoor National Park Authority, 01398 323665
info@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk

Cover photo: Timberscombe Oak



Ivy roots

Bird boxes in Burrige Woods

Chiselcombe

Endemic Whitebeam Fruit

Working to keep Exmoor's Woodlands special all year round

Exmoor National Park and other woodland owners undertake most essential woodland work throughout the winter when trees are dormant and most wildlife is hibernating or less active (below). Work in the woodland generally stops in Spring and Summer (right) to minimise disturbance to nesting birds and other wildlife.



Exmoor's woodland work...

Work is planned ahead for future years by undertaking **surveys 13** such as recording the volume of standing timber and marking some trees to be removed. Some important trees are left in the woodland including future quality timber trees, old trees, rare trees and trees with wildlife interest such as those with bat roosts or rare lichens.

Felling and extracting some trees to allow others to grow on is called thinning and is a sustainable way to manage woodlands. The process also allows more light into the woodland which stimulates the remaining trees to put on more height and girth and encourages other woodland plants to flourish. A **forwarding tractor and trailer 16** collects the felled timber and places it in log stacks before being collected.

Coppicing 15 is a traditional way to manage broadleaved woodland by cutting trees down to ground level and harvesting the re-grown shoots after a number of years. The trees can be coppiced indefinitely because they always send out fresh shoots in

response to being cut back. As well as providing a range of useful coppice products like firewood, coppicing allows lighter conditions into woodlands which many animals and plants benefit from.

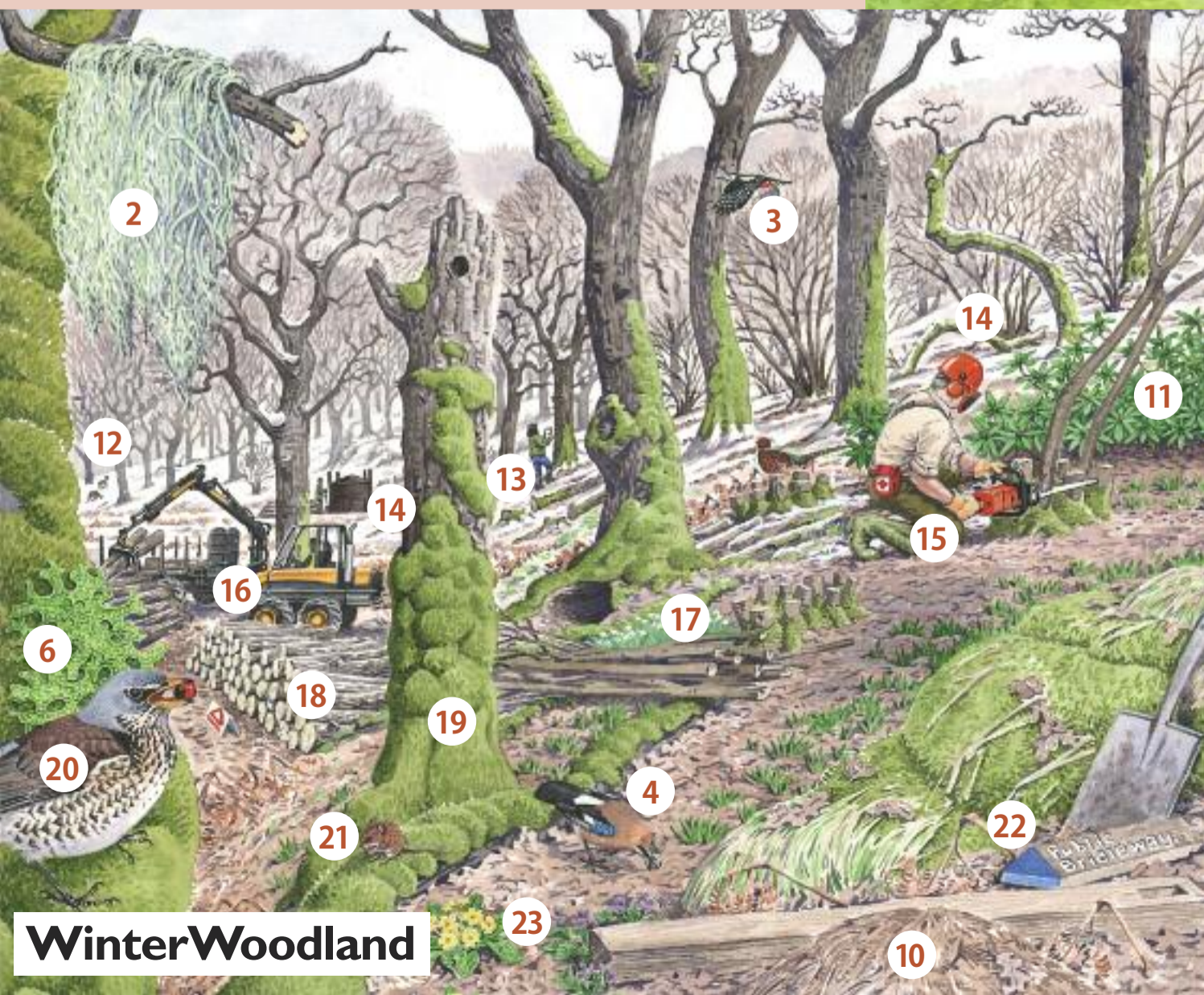
Stacks of timber 18 in woodlands are usually waiting to be collected and turned into products such as fencing bars or woodfuel.

Some of the **harvested timber** is made into products by Exmoor National Park Authority such as sign posts **22** and gates, for use in the National Park.

Making **charcoal 14** is an excellent way to utilise small lengths of wood, such as the branchwood after the tree has been felled. Charcoal has been made for hundreds of years and before it began to be used for heating barbecues, it was used to fuel furnaces for making products like iron, lime and glass. Charcoal platforms - some hundreds of years old - can still be seen on the valley sides.



Ask for a free woodland habitat poster in any Exmoor National Park Centre.



...helps Exmoor's woodland wildlife

Woodlands are very resilient habitats and their wildlife has been able to tolerate occasional disturbances for as long as woodlands have been managed by people. Some disturbance can help to improve the balance of light and shade in woodlands and stimulate plants to flourish which in turn helps other wildlife such as some species of butterfly.

Exmoor's clean, moist and unpolluted air helps to support a number of important lichen species such as the **string of sausages lichen (Usnea species) 2** and **lungwort lichen (Lobaria species) 6**. Lichens also need sufficient light to grow, so thinning some trees can prevent rare lichens from being shaded out. Species of moss cloak the trunks of trees and thrive in the moist climate.

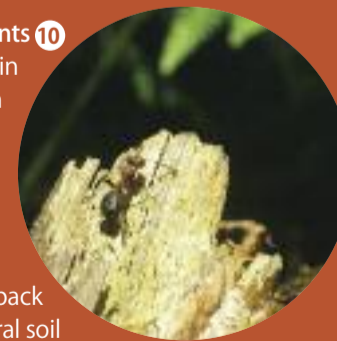
A **fieldfare 20** is a type of thrush which visit Britain in winter and eat berries as well as worms and insects. They are often grouped together in flocks and make loud chattering calls to each other as they move through the landscape.

Jays 4 bury acorns during the autumn and winter to act as a food store for them during the cold winter months. So many acorns are buried that some will be forgotten by the jays and instead they will germinate and, with luck, will form new oak trees.

Woodmice 21 make their homes throughout the countryside including within woodlands where they store food such as

nuts and berries in burrows or hollow trees. Along with voles, they make up a high proportion of the diet for owls. They live for around 18 months and have 1-2 litters of young during that time.

During the winter months, **wood ants 10** are less active and live deeper within their nests where it is warmer. Each nest can contain thousands of individual ants which largely live off the honey dew created by aphids. Wood ants will milk the aphids' honeydew and then feed this to the queen and worker ants back in the nest. Their nests have a central soil inner covered with a "thatch" of dry matter such as conifer needles, heather, leaves and twigs which are gathered from the woodland. The thatch keeps the nest warm as well as dry, which is essential for keeping the colony alive.



Standing **deadwood trees 19** make excellent homes for wildlife including birds, bats, small mammals and invertebrates, as well as lower plants like fungi, lichens, mosses and ferns.

Rhododendron 11 is a plant from Asia which was introduced principally as game cover during Victorian times.

Unfortunately it spreads extremely quickly through woodlands and smothers native plants. Much work has been done on Exmoor to eradicate rhododendron from woodlands. During winter it can be easier to spot some wildlife in woodlands because there are no leaves on the trees and other vegetation has died back. The coats of **red deer 12** have turned greyish-brown from their summer reddish coats and have become thicker to help insulate the deer from the cold winter.

Different wildlife can be seen in summer, for example fieldfares have flown to northern Europe and other birds like **redstarts 8** and **pie flycatchers** may be seen instead in woodlands. Early spring flowers like snowdrops, primroses and violets gradually give way to bluebells, **wood anemones 9** and wild garlic. By mid-summer, the tree canopy has made the woodland much darker and there are fewer flowering plants seen, except in sunnier glades and woodland rides. Some species remain in woodlands all year round including birds like Jays or **great spotted woodpeckers 3** and mammals such as **red deer 12**. Other wildlife will be hibernating such as **hazel dormice 1** and **badgers. 7**

Early spring flowers like **snowdrops 17**, **primroses 23** and violets can be seen in sunny woodland glades during late winter and early spring. The first leaves of **bluebells 5** emerge through the soil before they flower in April and May.