



# The South West: Somerset and Dorset

National Nature Reserves



## Your chance to see nature at its best!

Somerset and Dorset have an outstanding variety of wildlife habitats – everything from lush woodland and ancient peat bogs to dry heaths and rocky Jurassic coast. These are places where you can see rare plants and animals, abundant bird life and interesting archaeological remains.

The best examples of these habitats are protected as National Nature Reserves – Britain's finest wildlife sites. As well as offering protection, National Nature Reserves are places for scientific research and good conservation management – they also give the public a chance to experience wildlife at first hand.

### Site facilities key



Partial Easy Access



Visitor Centre



Car Park



Picnic Area



Toilets



Cafe & Refreshments



Public Transports



Hides



Dogs Admitted



Leaflets Available



Wheelchair Access



Information Panels



## Visiting National Nature Reserves

This leaflet describes 12 superb National Nature Reserves in Somerset and Dorset that you can visit for quiet enjoyment. The map shows a further nine reserves in the region.

Each entry in this leaflet has symbols showing the facilities that are available at each reserve and whether or not dogs are permitted. Many of the reserves also offer exciting events or can provide guided walks for organised groups. The reserves are open all year round although the seasonal interest varies.

When you visit, please make sure that you have suitable clothing and footwear and be prepared for changes in the weather. Do not leave any bags or valuables on display in your car.

There are often opportunities for volunteers to get involved in looking after Reserves, including habitat management and recording wildlife.

Remember, these places are working reserves, not parks. Wildlife conservation and the peaceful enjoyment of nature are the goals here, so please follow the Countryside Code at all times.

## Bridgwater Bay



Bridgwater Bay is part of the Severn estuary and includes the mouth of the river Parrett which meanders through the heart of the Somerset Levels.

The reserve is an internationally important roosting site for waterfowl and wading birds, with around 190 species of bird. From a large tower hide you get an excellent view of the bay, where flocks of several thousand birds can be seen at the busiest times of the year.

### When to come

- High water in spring and autumn for migrant birds.
- Late August for moulting Shelduck.
- High water in winter months for flocks of Wigeon, Teal, Lapwing, Curlew and Dunlin.

### How to get here

#### By road

From Bridgwater you should take the A39 to Cannington then follow the road to Steart. The Bridgwater Bay car park is open every day except Christmas Day.

#### By bus

The nearest bus service stops at Combwich (which is 5 miles away). The service is intermittent.

#### By train

The nearest train station is at Bridgwater.

### Relevant information

Grazing animals are present throughout the year so dogs must be kept under close control.

#### Your safety

Mudflats are very dangerous, and you should not attempt to walk out to sea at low tide.

### Contact details

Tel: 0300 060 6000

Email: [somerset@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:somerset@naturalengland.org.uk)



## Dunkery and Horner Wood



Walkers and birdwatchers alike enjoy this lovely part of England. If you visit between April and August you can see woodland birds at Horner Wood, and moorland birds and butterflies on the uplands of Dunkery Hill. At 519m, Dunkery Beacon is the highest point in Somerset.

From Webber's Post you can take a circular route that is suitable for people of all abilities. There are splendid views of Horner Wood and the surrounding moorlands. Two further circular walks of 2 miles and 5 miles start from Horner village.

### When to come

- All year round for lichens and mosses.
- Mid-April to August for moorland and woodland birds.
- June and July for butterflies.
- Autumn and winter for Red deer.

### How to get here

#### By road

The nearest villages are Luccombe and Horner, which you can get to by minor roads that lead south from the A39. There is a large car park at Horner with additional parking at Luccombe, Webber's Post and alongside the road over Dunkery Hill.

#### By train

West Somerset Railway Company operates a seasonal rail service, including steam locomotives, linking Taunton to Minehead.

#### By bus

Services run throughout the year between Minehead and Porlock, passing within a mile of the reserve. From July to September the 'Exmoor Explorer' bus leaves Minehead and follows a circular route around Exmoor.

### Relevant information

Dogs are permitted throughout the reserve but must be kept under control.

#### Your safety

Please take care as there are uneven paths, steep slopes and soft ground.

### Contact details

Tel: 01643 862452

Email: [holnicote@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto:holnicote@nationaltrust.org.uk)

[www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk)



## Durlston



This hilly, cliff-top reserve – part of the internationally designated Jurassic Coast World Heritage site – offers glorious countryside and spectacular coastal views. At the Visitor Centre you can listen to sounds from the seabed, see live pictures of the seabird colonies, and read a daily diary of wildlife sightings.

The four trails provide ideal starting points for your exploration of Durlston. The Clifftop, Wildlife, Woodland and Victorian Trails are clearly waymarked, with good access. A 'tramper buggy' is available for free loan. Some areas are not suitable for wheelchairs, standard electric buggies or the tramper buggy.

### When to come

- April to June for seabirds and wildflower meadows.
- June to August for butterflies and wildflowers.
- September to October for bird migration.



© Dorset County Council

## How to get here

### By road

Take the A351 from Wareham (11 miles), or come across the Sandbanks-Studland ferry from Bournemouth (10 miles) to Swanage. Follow the brown tourist signs up the hill and park in the pay and display car park.

### On foot

You can walk to the reserve via one of the many public footpaths from Swanage or Langton Matravers, or take the South West Coast Path from the west.

### By bike

Follow the road up from Swanage. Once you arrive at Durlston there are no cycle routes or bridleways, so park your cycle at the secure stands by the Visitor Centre.

### By bus

The no. 40 service from Poole and the no. 50 from Bournemouth both arrive in Swanage, which is about 1 mile from Durlston.

### By train

The nearest mainline train station is at Wareham (11 miles away). A steam train runs from Swanage to Corfe Castle. You will need to walk, or take a bus or taxi once you have arrived at the Swanage bus and train station.

## Contact details

Tel: 01929 424443

Email: [durlston@dorsetcc.gov.uk](mailto:durlston@dorsetcc.gov.uk)

[www.durlston.co.uk](http://www.durlston.co.uk)

## Ebbor Gorge



Ebbor Gorge was created 200,000 years ago when a huge cavern collapsed. Remains of mammals from the Ice Age have been discovered in the small caves that were left behind.

Popular with walkers and hikers, this largely wooded reserve offers you a number of trails to choose from. These range from a nature trail suitable for wheelchairs to a strenuous scramble through the gorge itself.

The best times of year to visit are spring for wildflowers, including bluebells, and autumn for colourful displays.

### When to come

- Spring for woodland flowers and butterflies.
- Autumn for fungi and woodland colour.

### How to get here

#### By road

The reserve is off the A371 between Cheddar and Wells or up the hill towards Priddy from Wookey Hole. Ebbor Gorge car park is open from 9am until dusk.

#### By train

The nearest train stations are in Highbridge & Burnham (12 miles to the west) and Castle Care (12 miles to the south-east).

#### By bike

The National Cycle Network route 3 passes the car park.

### Relevant information

Please keep dogs on a lead so that they do not disturb wildlife.

### Your safety

Please keep to waymarked paths and beware of cliff edges. Some of the paths are steep and slippery. Stone steps can be slippery when wet.

### Contact details

Tel: 0300 060 6000

Email: [somerset@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:somerset@naturalengland.org.uk)



## Ham Wall



An internationally important wetland, Ham Wall was created from old peat workings and is now a real favourite amongst bird watchers.

You might see otters or water voles here – they are present in good numbers. And if you are visiting in spring, you'll find the reedbeds alive with birdsong.

The main track through the reserve follows the old Glastonbury to Highbridge railway line. Facilities include a viewing area, walkways, tactile signs and handrails – all of which are accessible to wheelchair users.

### When to come

- Early summer for warblers, hobbies and bittern.
- Winter for wildfowl.



## How to get here

### By road

The reserve is located off the B3151 from Meare or off the A39 from Ashcott Village. You will find the entrance to the reserve and limited car parking at Ashcott Corner on the Ashcott–Meare road (grid ref: ST449397, OS Landranger map 182). Please do not park on the road.

### By train

The nearest train stations are at Bridgwater (14 miles) and Castle Cary.

### By bike

You can get to the reserve by bike via a disused railway line. This is a traffic-free route off the National Sustrans National Cycle Network route 3.

## Relevant information

There are two parking spaces for less able visitors along the old railway. These can be accessed by a RADAR key.

A motorised buggy for use on the reserve is available for collection from the Natural England office, Shapwick Heath National Nature Reserve, Westhay. Tel: 01458 860120 to arrange a booking.

### Your safety

Wetlands can be dangerous. Watch out for uneven paths, soft ground and deep water.

## Contact details

Tel: 01458 860494  
Email: [ham.wall@rspb.org.uk](mailto:ham.wall@rspb.org.uk)  
[www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk)

## Hambleton Hill



Hambleton Hill's prominence in the landscape has attracted people for 6,000 years. The impressive archaeological features include a well-preserved Iron Age hillfort and a Neolithic causewayed enclosure.

The fine, chalk turf on the steeper slopes supports a variety of attractive flowering plants, butterflies and other insects.

It is a short, steep climb to the top of the Hill but you will be rewarded with stunning views across five counties on a clear day.

### When to come

- All year round for windswept walks and dramatic views.
- From April to early September for flowers, butterflies and skylarks.
- May for early gentian and meadow saxifrage.
- Late June and early July for pyramidal orchid and bee orchid.

### How to get here

The reserve is about 4 miles north of Blandford Forum, north Dorset.

### By road

You can get to the reserve from the villages of Child Okeford or Shroton, which are served by minor roads from the A357 and A350. Parking is on the roadside; there is a small car park on the minor road about a mile south-east of Child Okeford.

### By train

The nearest train station is at Gillingham, 9 miles away.

### By bus

Wilts & Dorset runs a bus service between Gillingham and Blandford Forum along the A350. It serves the village of Shroton which is a half-hour walk from the reserve. There are less frequent services from Gillingham to Child Okeford.

### On foot

Two long-distance trails pass near the reserve: the Wessex Ridgeway and the Stour Valley Way.

### By bike

Child Okeford is at the junction of Route 25 and the Route 41 link of the Sustrans National Cycle Network.

### Relevant information

Dogs must be kept on a lead while sheep are on the Hill. Signs at all access points to the reserve will indicate when sheep are grazing.

### Contact details

Tel: 0300 060 6000

Email: [dorset@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:dorset@naturalengland.org.uk)



## Hartland Moor and Stoborough Heath



Popular with birdwatchers and walkers, these adjacent reserves are a first class example of rare dry heath and valley mire habitats.

The Great Knoll, at 34 metres, is the highest point on the reserves. You can enjoy superb views of the surrounding countryside from this distinctive feature. There is also an 800-metre nature trail.

### When to come

- Summer for heathland flowers, Dartford warblers, nightjar and stonechats.
- Winter for merlin and hen harrier.



### How to get here

#### By road

The reserves are served by C roads that link with the A351 Wareham to Swanage road. Stoborough Heath has a car park.

#### By train

The nearest railway station is at Wareham, which is about 2 miles away.

#### By bus

A bus route operated by Wilts and Dorset travels past the reserves on the A351. Two stops are within 200 yards of the reserves.

#### By bike

National Cycle Network Route 2 runs past the reserves. Although there are no cycle routes in the reserves themselves, the quiet minor roads that cross and run alongside them are suitable for cyclists of all abilities.

Hartland Moor is listed as part of the Fieldfare Trust's Millennium Miles project as having disabled access via the Hartland Way, a 410-metre track that follows Scotland Road – the path of a disused tramline. The path is accessed via a gate opposite Middlebere Farm, or via a track off the Slepe Farm to Corfe Castle Road.

### Relevant information

Dogs must be kept on a lead between April and August.

### Contact details

Tel: 0300 060 6000

Email: [dorset@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:dorset@naturalengland.org.uk)

## Morden Bog



Lying within the pine plantations of Wareham forest, this reserve has a well-documented history that goes back hundreds of years. This includes the use of decoy ponds that were used to catch ducks and can still be seen today.

All six of Britain's reptile species and a variety of plants have found a suitable home in the dry heath to the north and bog system on the reserve.



### When to come

- Summer for Marsh gentian, heathers, bog asphodel, dragonflies and hobby.
- Winter for merlin and hen harrier.

### How to get here

#### By road

Morden bog is 3 miles north of Wareham. There is a car park off the B3075, 1.5 miles north of its junction with the A351.

#### By train

The nearest train station is in Wareham, which is 3 miles away.

### Relevant information

To avoid disturbing ground-nesting birds (and in accordance with the Countryside and Rights of Way Act), dogs must be kept on a lead between April and August.

### Contact details

Tel: 0300 060 6000

Email: [dorset@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:dorset@naturalengland.org.uk)

## Shapwick Heath



Much of this significant wetland reserve was created through the restoration of old peat workings. With more than 64 species of birds nesting here each year, and large numbers of wildfowl present in the winter months, the site is deservedly popular with birdwatchers.

Parts of 'Sweet Track' – an ancient causeway engineered by Neolithic man in the 39th century BC – are still preserved today at Shapwick Heath.

You can find out more about the natural and historical features of this reserve by coming along to the programme of activities, including guided walks, that run throughout the year.



© Lynne Newton

### When to come

- Birds can be seen all year round.
- Spring for wildflowers and birdsong.
- Summer for hobby.
- Winter for large numbers of wildfowl.
- Anytime for the chance to see otters.

### How to get here

#### By road

The reserve is located 8 miles from the M5 (Junction 23), approx <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> mile north of Shapwick village and 4 miles west of Glastonbury. Access to the site is via minor roads from the A39 and B3151. The nearest car park is at the Peat Moors Centre, 500 metres north of the reserve's main entrance.

#### By train

The nearest train station is at Castle Cary, which is 15 miles away.

#### By bike

The reserve is near National Route 3 of the Sustrans National Cycle Network.

### Relevant information

Sorry but dogs are not allowed on the site as they disturb our wildlife.

A short, elevated boardwalk suitable for wheelchairs runs from Ashcott Corner visitors' car park into the reserve.

#### Your safety

Wetlands can be dangerous. Watch out for uneven paths, soft ground and deep water.

### Contact details

Tel: 0300 060 6000

Email: [somerset@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:somerset@naturalengland.org.uk)

## Studland and Godlingston Heaths



One of the largest unspoilt tracts of lowland heathland in the UK, this reserve also includes one of the most expansive areas of sand dunes.

A large freshwater lake on the site, called 'Little Sea', supports nationally important plant and bird life. While you are enjoying the wildlife here you may also come across the many archaeological remains that are scattered throughout the reserve. These range from man-made hollows, barrows and standing stones to 20th-century bunkers and shell holes.



© Natural England

### When to come

- All year round interest for birds.
- May to August for flowers and insects, reptiles and summer migrant birds.
- September for marsh gentians.
- Winter for birds on Little Sea.

### How to get here

#### By road

The B3351 terminates on the coast at the village of Studland. From here, a minor road (Ferry Road) runs north through the reserve to South Haven Point. You can park at the National Trust's car parks at Shell Bay, Middle Beach, Knoll Beach and South Beach, or along the Ferry Road for access away from the beach.

#### By ferry

The Studland Ferry crosses from Poole to South Haven Point at the top end of the Studland peninsula every 20 minutes.

#### By bus

A bus service runs from Bournemouth to Swanage via Studland.

#### By train

The nearest train station is at Wareham (5 miles to the north west).

### Relevant information

All-terrain wheelchairs, and binoculars are available for hire from the National Trust visitor centre at Knoll Beach.

### Contact details

Tel: 01929 450259

Email: [studlandbeach@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto:studlandbeach@nationaltrust.org.uk)

[www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk)

## Tarr Steps Woodlands



Tarr Steps is an outstanding example of a 'clapper' bridge – an ancient form of bridge constructed entirely from large stone slabs and boulders. Situated on Exmoor, the bridge is a scheduled monument that deserves a visit. The name 'Tarr' is thought to be derived from the Celtic word 'tochar', meaning 'causeway'.

The woodlands that surround Tarr Steps are internationally important for the mosses, liverworts and lichens found there. A number of footpaths go through the site, including a pleasant circular walk from the car park.

### When to come

- Spring and early summer for flowers and bird song.

### How to get here

#### By road

Tarr Steps is off the B3223 road over Winsford Hill between Dulverton and Exford.

#### By bus

A bus route from Minehead to Tiverton runs along the B3223 within 1.5 miles of the reserve. Please contact First Group for details.

### Relevant information

#### Your safety

Watch out for uneven paths, steep slopes, slippery stones, soft ground and deep water.

#### Contact details

Exmoor National Park Centre on

Tel: 01398 323841

Email: [NPCDulverton@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk](mailto:NPCDulverton@exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk)

[www.exmoornationalpark.gov.uk](http://www.exmoornationalpark.gov.uk)



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## Westhay Moor



Since its establishment from former peat diggings, Westhay Moor has become recognised as one of the top birdwatching locations in Britain. You may well have seen it in one of the many wildlife documentaries that feature the reserve.

Westhay's biggest attractions for birdwatchers arrive in autumn and stay through the winter to January and February – many thousands of starlings that fill the sky as they arrive to roost among the reeds each afternoon before dusk.

You can enjoy the spectacle from the six birdwatching hides on the reserve, two of which have wheelchair access.

### When to come

- In the morning, all-year round, for otters.
- January and February for starlings.
- Summer for Cetti's warblers, marsh harrier and hobby.

### How to get here

#### By road

The reserve is north of the village of Westhay. The car park is just off the road to Godney, at the junction with Daggs Lane Drove.

#### By bus

The service 668 (Street to Lower Langford) runs from Monday to Saturday and stops in Westhay village.

#### By bike

Sustrans National Cycle Network route 3 runs along a disused railway line, just south of Westhay village.

### Relevant information

Dogs should be kept on a lead so that they do not disturb wildlife.

For guided walks/excursions/events/activities see [www.somersetwildlife.org](http://www.somersetwildlife.org)

#### Your safety

Wetlands can be dangerous. Watch out for uneven paths, soft ground and deep water.

### Contact details

Tel: 01823 652400

Email: [enquiries@somersetwildlife.org](mailto:enquiries@somersetwildlife.org)  
[www.somersetwildlife.org](http://www.somersetwildlife.org)



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