

Sue Goodfellow

The ecology of the river and surrounding area.

Can you tell me a little bit about the ecology and wildlife in this area of Dartmoor.

Well we're pretty well near the top of the limit of enclosed farming on Dartmoor, we've got the River Dart running through the fields and its got typical Dartmoor wildlife associated with it, so its got otters that move up and down there, although people are obviously pretty unlikely to see them, there are dippers, there are grey wagtails and there are salmon and trout that come back to spawn every year from the North Atlantic and sometimes the areas off Greenland and travel huge distances, specifically to come up here to spawn, which is amazing really. Then associated with the river, of course, there's all the river bank vegetation and so there's a lot of lush ferns and there are a lot of other smaller plants that are actually associated with seepage zones and things, along the edge of the river.

You've also, in this area, got some fabulous hay meadows, traditional hay meadows that have not been fertilised or ploughed for many many years and they are actually really really unusual, they've got links to other upland meadows in Britain, but for instance some of the species that we've got in the hay meadows around Postbridge are not found elsewhere in southern England but they are found in some of the upland hay meadows in the Peak District and the Yorkshire Dales, so there are links across more with other upland areas, in that respect, than there are elsewhere, and in the whole of Europe there are actually very few of those types of traditional hay meadows left, so again, they're really special and very unique to this area.

And what is it about hay meadows particularly?

I guess they're particularly diverse for their plant species, the fields around here, most of them have two or three species of orchid in them, they have a whole range of other plants, which compared to an improved field which might have two or three agricultural grasses and if you're lucky a bit of clover, is obviously much more diverse and associated with those plants you get a whole range of insects, spiders, butterflies, beetles, all of those things, and so the whole area is actually a real bio-diversity hotspot if you like.