

# Lower Coombe Royal

## Wildlife Report

Owners: Susi and Paul Titchener



*View of Lower Coombe Royal Gardens*

Lower Coombe Royal is a magnificent country house set in it's own private valley on the edge of Kingsbridge. The Lower Coombe Royal gardens are eight acres in size and have a fine collection of trees, both native and non-native. Of particular interest are the silver fir, japanese elm, judas tree and an enormous specimen of thuia. A series of paths take you on a meandering journey around the grounds with plenty of wildlife to see along the way.



*View of Shrubs*

*Opposite: Lower Coombe Royal in Setting*



There are over a hundred varieties of camellia and many different rhododendrons some of which are over fifty foot high and were planted in the 1840's. The gardens are of historical note, planted in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century by John Luscombe. He was an enthusiastic gardener and received seeds from Kew and America to create his American garden.

The bird song around the grounds is quite amazing, sitting out on the terrace is a good place to appreciate the wealth of bird life. The gentle babble of the woodpigeon who says 'I do like cornflakes, I do!' or that of the collared dove 'who are you, who are you!' can easily be heard along with the beautiful songs of the blackbird, song thrush, wren and robin. There are many finches around the grounds including chaffinch, goldfinch and bullfinch. Through the summer months the grounds become home to migrants such as chiffchaff, blackcap, garden warbler and willow warbler.



*Spotted Flycatcher*



*Willow Warbler*

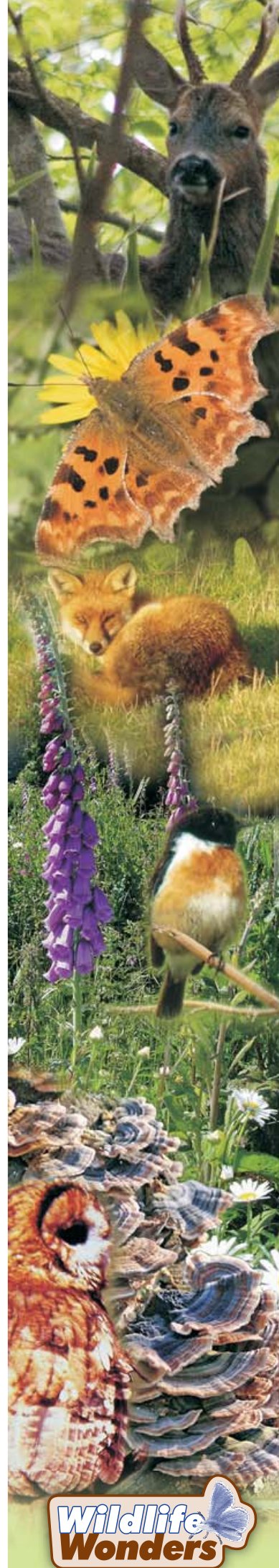
The large acacia tree at the front of the house is a good place to watch the spotted flycatcher as it does its unmistakable loop, flying down from a branch to catch flies and returning to the same spot. Crows and jays are a common sight in the wooded areas and high in the sky the deep 'barwk, barwk' of the raven can be heard. Listen out for the harsh 'chip' of the greater spotted woodpecker and the 'yaffle' of the green woodpecker.

Below the house and driveway is a medium sized pond with vegetation including yellow flag iris, foals water cress and a fine stand of arum lilies in the centre of the pond. There are some ghost fish in the pond which were introduced, though there is plenty of wildlife. The pond supports many species of damselflies such as blue tailed, common blue and large red.



*Pond*

Dragonflies can also be seen, they are much more robust looking than their sister species the damselfly. Another difference is at rest they keep their wings out, whereas damselflies fold their wings up. Emperor, golden ringed and southern hawkers are among some of the dragonflies that can be seen.



Around the pond are bushes and trees including, alder, cherry, dogwood, guelder rose and elder. The ground flora consists of herb bennet, red campion, herb robert, and ground elder. Up along from the pond are a series of Victorian drains, look for the pond skaters on the surface and lesser and greater water boatmen and water beetles underneath and even eels have been seen. As you follow the thin paths through the vegetation, which is a tangle of rhododendrons, there are clearings with a fine example of a large royal fern. When the sun is shining check out the dappled sunlight through the tree canopy, hoverflies can be seen showing themselves off to each other in the individual rays.



*Victorian Drain*



*'Rainforest'*



*Royal Fern*

There are wet flushes underneath the tree canopies as you go deeper into the 'rain forest' area, these are carpeted with swathes of golden saxifrage and in the drier area the ground flora consists of dog's mercury, woody nightshade, enchanter's nightshade, skullcap and woodruff. Within the scrub listen for the chortley fruity song of the blackcap easily mistaken for the song of the garden warbler which can also be heard here.



*Golden Saxifrage*



*Blackcap (Male)*

Where clearing works and pruning has been carried out log piles have been left, these are a great habitat for wildlife as they provide shelter for small



mammals and birds as well as invertebrates; dead wood is a highly valuable wildlife resource. On sunny days you may see slow worms emerging. Around this area the ground flora consists of wild garlic, hart's tongue fern, hard fern and broad buckler fern with the little yellow flowers of wood pimpernel dotted around.

As you wander through the gardens look out for the many butterflies that can be seen again particularly in sunny patches where there are flowers for them to visit. Large, small and green veined white, peacock, red admiral, speckled wood, gatekeeper and meadow brown are among those to be seen.



*Gatekeeper*



*Red Admiral*

On balmy evenings it is worth having a stroll around the grounds as you will more than likely be rewarded with sightings of a bat or two. They will probably be pipistrelle but noctules and lesser and greater horseshoe are possible. Where there are bats there are moths! Look out for the large hawkmoths or the cream and white stripes of the jersey tiger with its red underwings or the aptly named swallowtail with its pointed swallow tail-like wings - although it's a pale yellow colour rather than blue!



*Bugle*



*Foxgloves*

Up from the orchard area is a fantastic display of bugle and foxgloves in summer, there is plenty of insect life with many butterflies and bees busily collecting nectar. Here the long vegetation provides excellent cover for grasshoppers and crickets, which are identified easily from each other. Grasshoppers have short antennae whereas crickets have long curly antennae. Grasshoppers have short antennae whereas crickets have long curly antennae. The great green bush cricket can be found here, fully grown they are 8 cm in length and lime green in colour. Through the summer months, high in the sky the sickle-shaped wing of the swifts can be seen along with their high-pitched evocative screams.





*Paths showing the surrounding vegetation*

Walking along the paths there are intermittent clearings which offer a view of the grounds. The dappled light through the overhanging vegetation is a great place to watch the insect life, speckled wood, gatekeeper, large skipper and peacock butterflies can be seen. Listen for the high-pitched tinkerling call of the goldcrest high in the trees above.



*Goldcrest*



*Peacock*

Around the potting shed and greenhouse there is plenty of ivy and bramble which is good cover for small mammals, reptiles and birds, as well as providing food from the berries and a nectar source from the blossom and flowers. Ivy is particularly good as it flowers in autumn and then has berries in the winter when other food sources have disappeared.

There is a beech copse at the front of the house which has several bird boxes dotted within it. There are many bird species found in this area including blue tit, great tit and coal tit, and in the winter months parties of long tail tit pass through the shrubs and trees. Look for the greater spotted woodpecker tapping for grubs in the trees, can be identified by its undulating flight as it travels from tree to tree.





*Beech Trees*



*Nest Box and Log Pile*

There are log piles beneath the trees which provide a home for small mammals and reptiles such as slow worms. The logs are also a good substrate for fungus to grow on particularly bracket fungus, dead man's fingers and candle snuff. Look on the ground also for earth and puff balls and many different types of toadstool, particularly through the autumn months.



## Species List

Trees and shrubs	Plants	Birds
(Native not ornamental)	Annual meadow grass	Blackbird
Ash	Bluebell	Blackcap
Beech	Bramble	Blue tit
Black Alder	Burdock	Buzzard
Blackthorn	Cleavers	Carrion crow
Buddleia	Cocksfoot	Chaffinch
Elder	Ground Ivy	Chiffchaff
Field Maple	Giant hogweed	Coal tit
Guelder rose	Common dog violet	Dunnock
Hawthorn	Cow parsley	Fieldfare
Hazel	Creeping buttercup	Garden warbler
Holly	Creeping Thistle	Goldfinch
Oak	Enchanters nightshade	Great tit
Rowan	Honeysuckle	Greater spotted woodpecker
Scots pine	Greater plantain	Green woodpecker
Silver Birch	Greater sedge	Greenfinch
Spindle	Herb Robert	Grey wagtail
Sweet chestnut	Honeysuckle	House martin
Wild cherry	Herb Bennet	House sparrow
Willow	Germander speedwell	Jackdaw
	Ivy	Jay
<b>Ferns</b>	Lord and ladies	Kestrel
	Marsh marigold	Linnet
Hard fern	Nettles	Long tail tit
Harts tongue fern	Primrose	Mallard
Lady fern	Red campion	Marsh tit
Male fern	Snowdrop	Meadow pipit
Scaly male fern	Timothy	Mistle thrush
	Water figwort	Pied wagtail
<b>Mammals</b>	Water mint	Raven
	Yellow flag iris	Redwing
Badger	Yorkshire fog	Robin
Bank vole		Rook
Common shrew	<b>Reptile &amp; amphibians</b>	Skylark
Daubentons bat		Song thrush
Field mouse	Common lizard	Sparrowhawk
Fox	Frog	Spotted Flycatcher
Hare	Grass snake	Stock dove
Lesser horseshoe bat	Palmate newt	Swallow



Pipistrelle bat	Slow worm	Swift	
Rabbit	Toad	Tawny owl	
Roe deer		Whitethroat	
Wood mouse		Willow warbler	
		Wren	

*NB This is not a comprehensive list*



## 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:

#### 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's 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 cirr 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**

Above the ruined village of Hallsands, by the row of old fishing cottages is a kittiwake colony, watch these noisy birds fly to and from their nesting site and 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. Cirl bunting breed in the area.

### **Wildlife sites further afield to visit:**

#### **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.

#### **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

#### **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



## Lower Coombe Royal Wildlife Enhancement Advice

Wildlife needs food and shelter: places where creatures can rest and nest. Gardens rich in wildlife have colour in all seasons, with plants blooming much of the year and seeds and fruit in the autumn and winter. A carefully planned structure should include plenty of variation in plant height and different habitat areas.

### Pond

An area of marsh habitat can be established at one end of the pond by planting plugs of cuckooflower, one of many attractive native plants for pond margins or marshes (orange-tip butterflies lay eggs on it). Other plants that could be planted include marsh-marigold, water avens, yellow flag iris, brooklime, ragged-robin, bogbean and water-plantain. Arrowhead is useful for emergent dragonflies and is also a specific food plant to some leaf beetles and also attracts hoverflies. This is a splendid plant for a largish pond.

The best way to keep a pond oxygenated and free of weed is to fill it with native pond plants. Always use British waterweeds and avoid non-native species such as swamp stonecrop or New Zealand pygmy weed (*Crassula helmsii* - also sold as *Tilleania aquatica*), parrot's feather (*Myriophyllum aquaticum*) and floating pennywort (*Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*). These are very invasive and will cause you problems and can spread to your neighbours downstream.

Best practice is to clear one section of the pond at a time and leave the vegetation you remove at the side of the pond for a day or so to give any small aquatic animals trapped in it chance to return to the water. Surplus pond vegetation makes excellent compost!

Ponds with fish support fewer species of aquatic animals for the simple reason that they are eaten, so it is best not to introduce them.

### Walls and fences

The grounds have many walls and banks that have been created using plastic bottles and newspapers and other rubbish by the previous owners. These are now covered by vegetation such as bramble and ivy and although not growing on an ideal medium, to clear this would cause more disturbance as they have become a good habitat for nesting birds, foraging and hibernating insects and small mammals.

Any new trellises which may be erected in the future should be attached about 10-15 cm from the wall using spacing blocks. Climbers should be planted approx. 10 cm away from the trellises, out of the dry zone. The space between trellis and wall will be ideal for nesting birds such as blackbird and dunnock and, on the ground, will provide a relatively safe green corridor for small mammals such as bank vole, wood mouse and shrews.

As well as providing cover for nesting birds, wild honeysuckle and ivy offer hibernation sites for butterflies such as brimstone and are good food plants



for hawkmoths (honeysuckle) whereas hoverflies, small tortoiseshells, commas, peacocks and other butterflies feed on ivy that flowers very late in the season.

### **Nest boxes**

Use an open fronted nest box behind a climbing plant to attract nesting birds such as robin and spotted flycatcher, one could be placed within the climber at the front of the house.

Nest boxes for birds should be carefully erected, but never on a south facing wall or fence in full sun. A couple of swift boxes erected on the buildings could also help to encourage swifts to nest, a calling tape should be used to attract the swifts: they come to investigate and hopefully stay to use the boxes. House sparrow terrace boxes could also be erected around the buildings and a tawny owl box could be put up in one of the bigger trees of the beech copse.

Bird boxes should be cleaned out in the autumn when there is no risk of disturbing the occupants. Clean them out with boiling water so that disease and parasites are killed.

### **Useful addresses**

Ash Tree Nursery, Bowden, Nr Dartmouth TQ6 0LR

Tel: 01803 712437

Mobile nos: 07792 525070/07980 922316

Supplier of native wild flowers and plants.

The Really Wild Nursery, 19 Hoopers Way, Torrington Devon EX38 7NS. Tel:

01805 624739. Website: [www.kathryn-moore.co.uk](http://www.kathryn-moore.co.uk)

Supplier of native wild flowers and plants.

Flora Locale website for locally sourced plants near you.

[www.floralocale.com](http://www.floralocale.com)

BBC website for useful information on nest boxes for both birds and mammals along with other wildlife tips.

[www.bbc.co.uk/science and nature](http://www.bbc.co.uk/science_and_nature)

Envisage Wildcare: mail-order conservation supplies, everything under the sun!

01793 724848, Freepost NAT18592, Swindon SN2 2BR



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Ground flora includes red campion, herb robert, herb bennet and woody nightshade. Look out for dragonflies such as southern hawker and golden ringed flying amongst the vegetation.

Watch the buzzards soaring on the thermals and the ravens tumbling in the sky or the flap and glide of the sparrowhawk.

Orchard area, stunning displays of foxgloves and bugle. Butterflies include speckledwood, gatekeeper, meadow brown and tortoiseshell.

Brash piles are left to decompose - look at the insect life on the wood as well as the different types of fungus.

Butterflies to look out for are tortoiseshell, red admiral, comma and speckled wood.

The ground flora beneath the 'rainforest' area includes golden saxifrage, woodruff, enchanters nightshade and skull cap.

greenhouse and potting shed

Badgers and foxes are regularly seen in the formal garden. Listen to the song thrush whilst sat here.

Yew hedge

Look out for spotted flycatcher in the trees around the house. It will fly in a loop from the branch it is sitting on.

formal garden

Beech copse - greater spotted and green woodpecker, jay, treecreeper and nuthatch can be seen and heard.

Yellow flag iris, arum lilly and fools water cress grow in the pond. Common blue, blue tailed and large red damselflies can be seen around the area along with emperor and golden ringed dragonflies. Mallard and moorhen also use the pond.

paddock

Through the summer, listen in the woodland and scrub for birds such as blackcap, garden warbler, willow warbler and chiffchaff.