



SOUTH EAST DEVON
WILDLIFE

South East Devon Habitat Regulations Executive Committee

Habitat mitigation team update

*Wildlife Wardens and Devon Loves Dogs
Countryside, Environment & Ecology
East Devon District Council
October 2025*

Legal comment/advice:

EDDC Legal have read the report and have no comments to make.

DEM.1-0007/October 2025/RAH

Finance comment/advice:

There are no direct financial implications set out in the report.

The purpose of this report is to provide a regular update from the habitat mitigation delivery team. This enables the Executive Committee to maintain a good understanding of the initiatives, partnership working and day to day activities of public-facing staff. Continued and effective delivery of the Strategy and the development this enables remains of very high importance to all partners.

1. Wildlife Wardens: Claire Spence (full time, maternity cover), Katie Jones and Sama Euridge (job share).

1. June

1.1 With continued good weather, the estuary was very busy with visitors. The team worked hard on the water, with five boat patrols this month and focus on the use of the boat tender to land at Dawlish Warren landing point at Soft Sand Bay.

1.2 Wardens Sama & Claire hosted Tim Child, Assistant Director for Place, Assets and Commercialisation on the patrol boat, providing a first-hand, “shop floor” look at the estuary and talking through the essential work of South East Devon Wildlife.



Figure 1 – Sama & Claire host Tim Child on the patrol boat.

1.3 Claire & Neil hosted the Habitat Regulations Executive Committee for the day. With several new councillors as portfolio holders, a boat patrol and visit to site was an opportunity to introduce the committee to locations key to our work.

1.4 Breeding bird season saw continued low rainfall, the team were on site talking to visitors about the need to be cautious – no BBQs or fires are permitted across any of our sites. The Paws on Paths messaging is key to our activities on the heaths, preventing disturbance to ground nesting birds.

Quick statistics : 34 interactions on the Pebblebed NNR, with one pop-up and 4 walking patrols. 5 visits to Dawlish Warren with 9 interactions.

1.5 Warden Claire attended Budleigh Gala Week event with the gazebo. The event was a lot of fun and gave her the chance to have some great in-depth conversations.

1.6 Sama & Claire joined in at Broadclyst Fun Day, engaging with the community and raising awareness about the heaths. This was a busy event and exactly our heath visiting target audience: 110 visitors spoken to.



Figure 2 – Claire at Broadclyst Fun Day

1.7 Planning and organisation for Heath Week continued, with the team creating activities for Heath Week festival day, Bystock Discovery day and a guided wildlife walk.

1.8 Sama & Claire, along with the Pebblebed Heath Conservation Trust's (PHCT) Otter Estuary Ranger, Rick Lockwood, attended a knowledge exchange and site visit at RSPB Exminster Marshes. The team received an update on how the reserve is managed for locally rare breeding birds, including lapwing and redshank. Warden Rob Johns gave a tour of the site, explaining the irrigation system necessary for keeping habitat at its best and the extensive predator control fencing.

1.9 Sama, Claire, Julie & Katie attended a CMA training day on the Dartmoor Curlew Project. Now functionally extinct on this previous breeding stronghold, Curlew chicks are being "headstarted" (reintroduced) as part of this project. While numbers are still desperately low, this was an informative insight into how habitat on Dartmoor is managed for conservation and the links to the species and habitats found in the Exe Estuary.



Figure 3 – the team learning about Curlews at a training event run by the Countryside Management Association.

2. July

2.1 Preparations for a potential new partnership to share resources were initiated this month. Subject to agreement between ECC Port Authority and SEDW, we are trialling the use of the Harbour patrol RIB. The Warden team began training on the RIB with Graham Manchester, building skills for safe and effective patrols. Patrols on our current patrol boat, Branta Isca, will continue during a crossover period. Four boat patrols this month.

2.2 Claire & Sama attended Exmouth Festival, a busy and hugely successful event where we shared information about the amazing bird species of the Exe. This year's festival theme was 'Stories from the Sea' – an easy tie in for us to talk about shorebird migration and the importance of not disturbing overwintering birds. More than 200 interactions recorded over the weekend.



Figure 4: Sama and Claire at Exmouth Festival.

2.3 Claire took part in the Women's Forum with PHCT, an opportunity to connect with women user groups, hear their perspectives, and take part in the interactive icebreaker activities.

2.4 Claire & Sama attended Heath Week Festival Day on Saturday 26th July, launching Heath Week with a variety of engaging activities for families and children. Not only is it a wonderful experience to be able to offer free educational activities to local families, spreading our key messages on conservation and wildlife, but it's also great to catch up with project partners at PHCT, DWT & RSPB. Total engagements 54



Figure 1: The team, project partners and volunteers at Heath Week

2.5 Katie & Claire hosted a wellbeing morning, with yoga practices and gong meditation, reaching a new audience on the heaths and creating a relaxing, positive experience.

2.6 Sunday Crafter-noon was a huge success with a packed tent of people enjoying embroidery, ink printing, and spoon carving. Special thanks to Neil Harris for hosting this engaging workshop.



Figure 2: Heath week Crafter-noon.

2.7 Bystock Discovery Day on Tuesday 29th saw the warden team and Julie of Devon Loves Dogs at the stunning Bystock nature reserve. The team hosted activities included nature bracelet making, a silver studded blue butterfly craft, moth gliders, flapping bats and also led on pond dipping - a busy and successful day! Thanks extended to Phoebe Voysey, Ranger at Dawlish Warren (and previous SEDW volunteer) for assisting on the day.

2.8 Event organisation was coordinated by Warden Sama, Devon Wildlife Trust volunteer Sarah Butcher and site manager Ed Hopkinson. Feedback from visitors and volunteers hailed this as the best Discovery Day in many years. So many positive comments from visitors makes the hard work behind the scenes worthwhile. Total engagements for the day 220 with 131 people pond dipping!



Figure 3: Pond dipping at Bystock Discovery Day

2.9 Wardens Katie & Claire returned to Bystock to lead a Wildlife Walk on Wednesday 30th July, which drew 16 enthusiastic participants. The group included a wide variety of ages and enjoyed learning about the history, habitats, and wildlife of the heaths.



Figure 4: Wildlife Walk with the Wardens, Heath Week

2.10 Warden Claire hosted a Pop-Up at Woodbury Castle on Thursday celebrating the official launch of the PHCT Youth Rangers programme. She then joined a reptile walk with Rob Ward of the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust, learning about the six native reptile species (and spotting a grass snake and slow worm!)

2.11 Friday 1st August, Claire assisted RSPB project partners at Aylesbeare Common. The butterfly walk attracted 22 participants, with species spotted included brimstone, holly blue, gatekeeper, speckled wood, brown argus, and ringlet.

2.12 Heath week drew to a close with an Evening Guided Walk, where over 30 people experienced the heath at dusk. Highlights included nightjars, bat detecting with Sarah Butcher from the Devon Bat Group, and an incredible moth session with Paul Burgess and the Devon Moth Group. A huge thanks from all of us to everyone to make this year's Heath Week so memorable, volunteers, team members and visitors.

2.13 Other work : Four pop-ups on the Pebblebed NNR, totalling 73 engagements. Seven walking patrols, with 34 interactions. Five visits to Dawlish Warren NNR, with 19 interactions.

3. August

3.1 With both Sama and Claire on leave, Katie was supported by our dedicated team of volunteers for the majority of August.

3.2 Supported by Patrol Boat volunteers and partnership working with the Harbour Patrol team, Katie has been out on the water on 3 patrols this month.

3.2 Sama & Katie also attended a RIB training session with Harbour Master, Grahame Forshore.

3.3 With the launch of Exmouth Wildlife refuge upcoming on September 15th, forward planning for improving and diversifying our reach was carried out. Claire and Katie have completed Stand Up Paddleboard (SUP) training to gain the confidence to carry out patrols by paddle. Exmouth Wildlife Refuge is too shallow to include in patrols by boat and the team have been informally using paddleboards to reach visitors who have entered the refuge and are causing wildlife disturbance for several years. Promoting the team's SUP use is also a way to reach this user group, through press release and social media.

3.4 Four visits to Dawlish Warren NNR, with 20 interactions recorded. Five visits to the Pebblebeds NNR and 47 interactions.

3.5 The team have been working to promote a new initiative – a competition for the launch of the Exmouth Wildlife Refuge. In conjunction with Stuart Line Cruises, we are offering a pair of tickets on a birdwatching cruise and an FSC bird ID guide to one lucky winner every month from September through to December.

3.6 Competition entry requires the answering of multiple-choice questions on the running dates of the Wildlife Refuge, species we expect to see in the Refuge and why it's so important to remain out of the Wildlife Refuges - to give overwintering wildlife the space to rest and feed undisturbed. Answering these questions, ensures competition entrants have knowledge of the Wildlife Refuge and why it exists.



Figure 5: New Wildlife Refuge competition banners

3.7 New promotional banners have been designed by local illustrator, Mike Hughes, and have been printed and erected for competition start date on 1st September. Postcards to promote the competition have also been created, thanking visitors for remaining out of the Refuge.

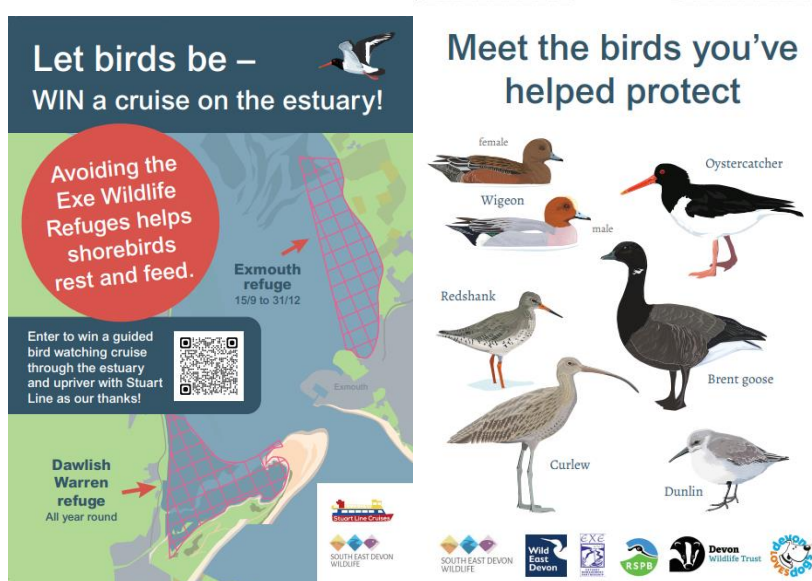


Figure 10: Postcard promoting the refuges, competition and wildlife on the Exe.

3.8 Both Claire and Katie assisted Penny Evans of Wild East Devon at Seaton Wetlands Holiday Club, enjoying a fantastic day connecting with nature and young explorers. Activities included kick sampling in the stream, discovering stonefly larvae (a sign of excellent water quality) and even baby European eels that had travelled from the Sargasso Sea!

4. September

4.1 The launch of the Wildlife Refuge Competition on social media – in a reel created by Warden Sama, has achieved more than 6k views.

4.2 The team continues with training on the harbour patrol RIB with Graham Manchester, ECC, in addition to standard patrols on Branta Isca, the wildlife patrol boat.

4.3 Landing of watercraft at soft sand bay at Dawlish Warren NNR has now concluded for the season and wardens have been reminding water users of this. Wardens have achieved 3 visits each to both the Pebblebed and Dawlish Warren NNRs, and a boat patrol.

4.4 Claire and Sama gave a presentation to the members of the Friday Club in Exeter on habitat mitigation and the work of SED Wildlife. Sama is planning for two school groups later this month on the topic of winter wildlife.

5. Devon Loves Dogs: Project Officer Julie Owen, Assistant Project Officer Trish Waller.

4.1 You may remember from my last update in June that we were recruiting an Assistant Project Officer for the Devon Loves Dogs team. The advertised role was very popular and Neil and I had a busy few weeks shortlisting 128 applicants and then conducting interviews. I'm delighted to welcome Trish Waller to the team. She started at the end of August and brings with her a whole range of talents and experience and a very genuine passion for dogs in the outdoors. We already have lots of ideas about how to develop the reach of Devon Loves Dogs!

4.2 I have continued with the programme of Waggy Walks and despite the hot, dry summer we managed to run all our walks as planned. It's essential that we don't lead walks when conditions are unsuitable for dogs, so I planned walks in the evenings and with earlier starts, mixed in with a small amount of good luck!

4.3 We have walked at Ashclyst Forest and Parke with the National Trust and Ridgetop Park with Teignbridge District Council. Kim from PHCT has continued to support DLD with a glorious evening walk during Heath Week to celebrate the Devon Loves Dogs 8th birthday (with goodie bags and "pupcakes" for dogs) and a rather wet and soggy walk on Mutters Moor.



Figure 11: Waggy Walk during Heath Week to celebrate DLD's 8th birthday.

4.4 I've attended several events over the summer including Heath Week Festival Day where I teamed up with Dawn Spence from "Pawsitive Canine" to chat to people about Canicross. I spent a busy day making dog themed crafts at Bystock Discovery Day, both as part of Heath Week.



Figure 12: The DLD gazebo set-up for pitstops and events.

4.5 In August, I attended the EDDC Resident Connect event at Budleigh Cricket Club. This was a great opportunity to meet local residents and understand some of the difficulties that people can have accessing the countryside, whether because of health restrictions and disabilities or being reliant on public transport.

4.6 Most recently Trish and I attended a charity event in Exminster “A Pawsome Day Out” promoting Devon Loves Dogs and Ridgetop Park whilst supporting an overseas dog charity. Despite the rain, this was a really good event and a great opportunity for networking.

4.7 Julie attended a Curlew training day hosted by the Countryside Management Association on Dartmoor in June, it was really useful to extend knowledge of this bird which we’re lucky enough to be able to observe on the Exe Estuary. Julie also attended a landscape recovery walk about the Clinton Devon Estates “Heaths to Sea” project which was a fascinating insight to how this area may be improved for people and wildlife in the future.

4.8 We’re looking forward, as the seasons change to a busy autumn, to promoting the Wildlife Refuges to protect our populations of overwintering birds. As Trish settles in, I’m excited to be able to expand the reach and opportunities that are available to Devon Loves Dogs now that we have more resource.

Addendum

Following restructuring of Service areas at East Devon District Council, all staff in the Habitat Mitigation team (including Delivery Manager) are hosted in the Countryside, Environment and Ecology Service under Assistant Director, Charlie Plowden, as of 1st August 2025.

Natural England comment:

Natural England have read the report and have no comment to make.