



South Devon

The South Devon Natural Area is a landscape of rolling hills separated by river valleys. It is bounded in the east by the Teign Valley and extends north to the edges of Dartmoor and westwards to the Tamar Valley up to Tavistock. The area is underlain by folded Devonian shales and slates, with isolated patches of limestone, particularly around Torbay and Plymouth, with smaller patches at Buckfastleigh and around Newton Abbot. At Berry Head and Hope's Nose these form cliffs and sea stacks that are home to nesting seabirds, while the upper parts of the cliffs and the limestone grasslands are home to several rare plant species. The built-up areas of Torbay and Plymouth provide habitats for Collared Doves and other urban species, and berry-bearing shrubs around the car parks of large stores are often used by Waxwings during invasions. Roofs and chimney-stacks are much used by breeding gulls, mainly Herring Gulls but also a few Lesser and Great Black-backed Gulls. Harbours such as that at Brixham provide shelter for seabirds in rough weather as well as a source of food from fish discards and offal.

Much of the area is used for intensive agriculture, with much dairying, raising of beef cattle and sheep grazing, but also with some cereal crops on the higher and more level ground. Fields are generally small and separated by Devon banks which may have a hedge on top. Narrow sunken lanes with flower-rich banks often separate areas of fields. Some areas of coastal grassland remain relatively unimproved and are grazed extensively by cattle.

The river valleys are often steep-sided and covered with oak woodlands. The *Devon Tetrad Atlas*

The mix of farmland and urban areas around Torbay.

Photo: Mike Langman

1977–85 included a few records of species such as Pied Flycatcher and Wood Warbler from these, but there are few recent records, perhaps because these areas are often difficult of access. Woodcock are frequent in these woods in winter. The rivers themselves have Dippers, Grey Wagtails and Kingfishers.

The coastal strip has already been dealt with in the Lyme Bay section above. Heathlands occur here and there along the coast and on a few of the higher hills, as well as in the Bovey Basin on the eastern boundary of the area, where flooded clayspits also provide the only areas of open water away from the coastal leys.

Devon Redlands

The Devon Redlands, underlain mainly by Permo-Triassic sands, silts and clays, are fertile, easily cultivated and mainly under arable crops. The oxidized iron in the soils gives them the red colour so characteristic of 'Red Devon'. They occupy much of the lower catchment of the River Exe, underlie the city of Exeter, and also much of the catchment of the River Otter.

However, local areas of more recent sediments – Cretaceous on the Haldon Ridge and late Triassic under the East Devon Pebblebed Heaths – are very free-draining and infertile and support internationally