

# Tamar Valley Special Species Spotter

What special species can you  
create a home for?



**Tamar Valley**  
National  
Landscape



# How can I help our special species?




This guide outlines the different types of habitat our Special Species live in, as well as how to spot them. We also list some of the ways in which we can all help protect and secure a future for the Tamar Valley Special Species - whether that is at work, at School, at home, or in our community spaces.

No matter how big or small a space is, it can still be incredibly valuable to wildlife. Read on for some top tips!


Become a wildlife champion to safeguard a future for the next generation of Nature and Nature lovers.



# What are the special species?




National Landscapes across the country are helping Nature recover. Nature is under threat and in response to this, the Tamar Valley National Landscape has created a Nature Recovery Plan to prioritise and invest in the recovery and enhancement of Nature.



Within this plan, Special Species have been adopted to help promote conservation efforts within the Tamar Valley. These plants and animal species act as champions for conservation work because they are of conservation importance or concern, are easily recognisable, and live in a variety of habitats across the Tamar Valley.

There are 17 Special Species, which are:

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- Nightjar
  - Avocet
  - Hedgehog
  - Heath Fritillary
  - Triangular Club Rush
  - Salmonoids
  - Plymouth Pear
  - Allis Shad
  - Bastard Balm
  - Common Toad
  - Harvest Mouse
  - Hazel Dormouse
  - Water Vole
  - Adder
  - Greater Horseshoe Bat
  - Calstock Prawn
  - Willow Tit



# Avocet



The Tamar Valley is lucky to host over 5% of the British overwintering population of Avocet!

**Habitat:** Wetland & estuaries.

**Best spot to see them:** South Hooe Nature Reserve (permissive pathway) and on the Lynher at Wacker Quay.

**Top Tips:** Head out to see these blue-legged birds during the winter months on the shallow mudflats.

**How to help:** Avocets need sheltered wetland habitats in which to feed and breed. We can help Avocets by keeping our rivers clean and creating wetland habitats. Think about what chemicals we dispose of down our sinks and toilets. Get involved by volunteering with Westcountry River Trust, monitoring water quality, river health and biodiversity.



# Triangular Club-Rush

At one point, the Tamar Valley estuaries were the only place this critically endangered plant could be seen in the UK. Efforts to reintroduce it elsewhere have begun.

**Habitat:** Wetlands & estuaries.

**Best spot to see them:** Cotehele National Trust wetlands.

**Top tips:** Grows between 50 - 150 cm tall and has a bright green angled stem.

**How to help:** Triangular Club-Rush is being threatened with waste tipping, sewage discharge, water pollution and invasive non-native species. We can all help this rare species by monitoring for any invasive non-native species, use fewer harsh chemicals that will end up in our watercourses, and ensuring that we dispose of our waste responsibly.



# 'Calstock' Prawn



This tiny prawn (*Palaemon longirostris*) was once thought to be found only in two estuaries in Britain, including the Tamar. It is more widespread now but we still consider it a special species, as it represents the millions of organisms that are out of sight and out of mind - so very important for whole ecosystems as they provide food for other estuarine species.

**Habitat:** Wetlands & estuaries.

**Best spot to see them:** Records from the Tamar and Lynher estuaries (but special surveys are needed to see them)

**How to help:** Like other species living in rivers, they are being threatened with water pollution. Take part in organised river cleans with local organisations, store rainwater in butts, plant trees to help soak up water and catch sediment in times of high flow, and volunteer to help remove non-native invasive species from our watery habitats.

# Allis Shad



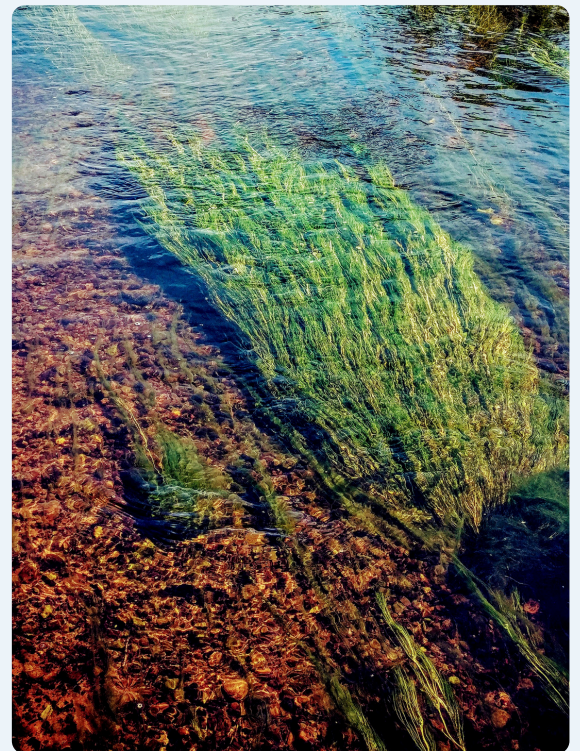
Allis Shad spend most of their life in the ocean before swimming up to freshwater to breed. The River Tamar is the only persistent breeding ground for this fish in the UK!

**Habitat:** Rivers, estuaries & ocean.

**Best spot to see them:** Gunnislake fish pass.

**Top tips:** Head to a fish pass to see fish migrating up river in April and May.

**How to help:** Allis Shad swim upstream to lay eggs in gravel beds and require good quality water. To reduce soil and other materials entering rivers, plant trees along river edges (riparian areas) and prevent livestock from entering watercourses. Report soil run-off to the Environment Agency.



# Atlantic Salmon



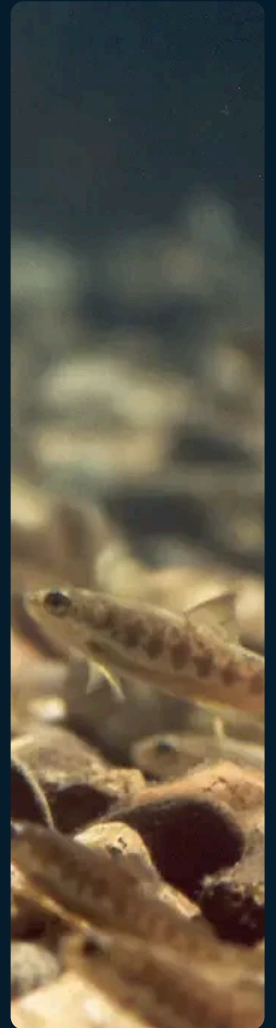
The Atlantic Salmon starts its life in the slow-flowing upper sections of the River Tamar, before journeying out to sea.

**Habitat:** Rivers, estuaries & ocean.

**Best spot to see them:** Gunnislake fish pass.

**Top tips:** If you're lucky, you might see an Atlantic Salmon leaping over waterfalls and travelling through fish passes.

**How to help:** Like other species living in rivers permanently, or temporarily, Salmon are threatened by water pollution, waste tipping, sewage entering the watercourse, and river warming. If you're a landowner, you can plant trees along the edge of gravel bed areas to increase shade cover - helping to cool the water for laid eggs and baby fish (fry). Volunteer to help plant trees along watercourses (riparian areas) near you, with local charities and organisations.





# Water Vole



Conjuring up images of *Wind in the Willows*, Water Voles are small mammals which make characteristic 'plops' when they dive into the water.

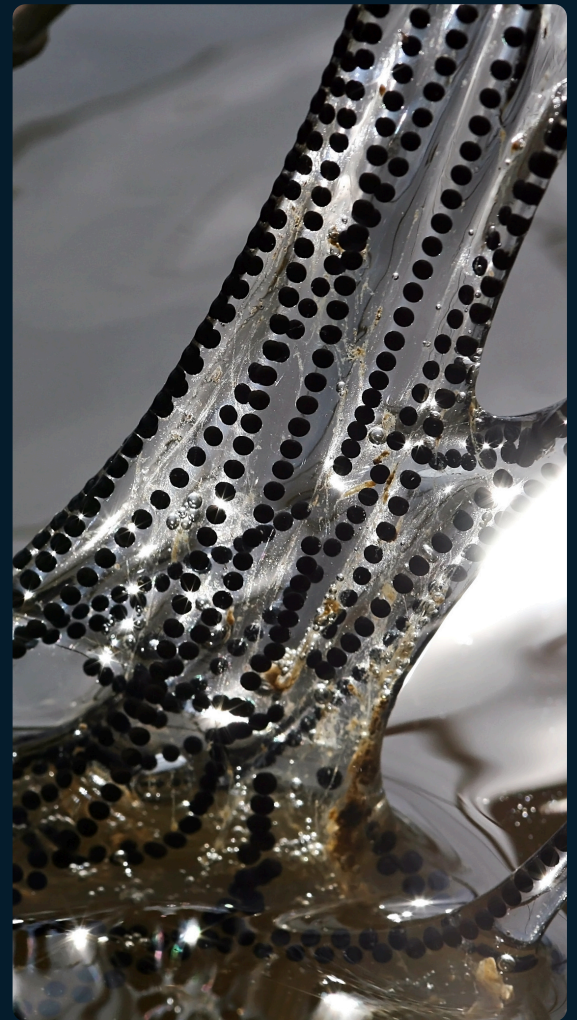
**Habitat:** Rivers, ponds, lakes & marshes.

**Best spot to see them:** There have been no consistent sightings in the Tamar Valley in recent times, however we are hopeful that the creation of wetland habitats will provide the habitats required to support future thriving populations.

**Top tips:** Look out for Water Voles' 'lawns' of nibbled grass outside their burrows and grass cut with 45 degree gnaw marks at the ends.

**How to help:** Water Vole populations are in decline because of habitat loss, pollution, and predation by the non-native American Mink. By creating buffer strips between livestock grazing and watercourses, areas where Water Voles could create their homes are protected. Water Voles love blackberries, so avoid trimming brambles and spraying with pesticides.

# Common Toad



Toads feed on slugs and snails, making them another helpful visitor to your garden and allotment!

**Habitat:** Ponds, hedgerows & woodland.

**Best spot to see them:** Common in village gardens, they love dark damp corners with rocks, organic material and laying dead wood, as well as by water edges.

**Top tips:** Look out for toads finding ponds to breed in from around Valentine's Day until late Spring.

**How to help:** It has been estimated that each year over 20 tonnes of toads are run over on roads in the UK alone. Help by creating toad crossing signage for areas where toads regularly migrate. Creating ponds is also important, no matter the size - big or small - they create spaces for toads to breed, as well as create homes for an array of other creatures.

# Adder



Adders are very shy, intricately patterned native snakes with a distinctive zig-zag down the back. Males are silver in colour whereas females tend to be reddy-brown.

**Habitat:** Lowland heath & woodland.

**Best spot to see them:** Kit Hill Country Park.

**Top tips:** Adders can be found basking in the sunshine on rocks or on paths, particularly on warm spring mornings.

**How to help:** Adders benefit from controlling bracken to allow them plenty of basking spaces. In addition, leaving fallen trees on the ground providing hibernation spaces during the cold months. You could even put down a sheet of corrugated metal to enable snakes and slow worms a spot to heat up their cold-blooded bodies.





# Nightjar



These rare migrant birds are masters of camouflage! But their characteristic wing clapping and churring song gives them away.

**Habitat:** In woodland - open coniferous woods and on heathland.

**Best spot to see them:** Tamar Trails.

**Top tips:** Head out at dusk from June to July to see and hear them.

**How to help:** Nightjars are ground nesting birds, so keep your dogs on leads and stick to the paths when walking and horse-riding to avoid crushing nests. Moths are a favourite food of Nightjars, so grow plenty of night-scented flowering plants to boost moth numbers. Jasmin, honeysuckle, evening primrose, and nettle are perfect!

# Heath Fritillary Butterfly



This endangered butterfly can only be found in one of four places in the UK - and the Tamar Valley is one of them!

**Habitat:** Woodland - glades in particular.

**Best spot to see them:** Greenscombe Woods Nature Reserve SSSI.

**Top tips:** Warm and sunny days in late-Spring to Summer are the best times to spot them.

**How to help:** This species favours coppiced woodland and glades within woodland. To help conserve this species, regularly maintain coppice and control bracken spread. Ensure that plenty of ribwort-plantain and common cow-wheat are present to provide food.

# Hazel Dormouse



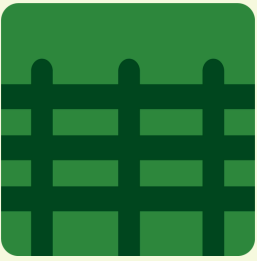
The population size of Hazel Dormice in the Tamar Valley is currently unknown, however, thought to be extremely rare and fragmented.

**Habitat:** Woodland & hedgerow.

**Best spots to see them:** It is believed there is a population on the Bere Peninsula, however there are no current up-to-date recordings. Dormice are a protected species and can only be handled and monitored under licensed ecologist.

**Top tips:** Look out for nibbled hazelnuts - Dormice have distinctive teeth markings which can be identified when looking at empty hazelnut shells.

**How to help:** Hazel Dormice need to build up their fat stores to hibernate through the Winter. Their favourite foods are hazelnuts and blackberries so add Hazel to tree and hedgerow plantings and leave patches of bramble to flower, fruit and flourish.



# Hedgehog

These easily recognisable mammals are known as a gardener's friend as they will happily eat slugs - worth welcoming into gardens and allotments!

**Habitat:** Woodland & hedgerow.

**Best spot to see them:** Surprisingly, in urban green spaces and garden networks.

**Top tips:** Hedgehogs are nocturnal (active at night) - put out a shallow dish of water for them to drink from in the hope to see them.

**How to help:** Hedgehogs cover a lot of ground to find food, so add hedgehog-sized holes in fences to provide them access to more spaces. Avoid using pesticides as these find their way into hedgehog's food and may kill hedgehogs as a consequence. Make or buy your own hedgehog house which provides a safe home for hedgehogs, especially to hibernate through the winter in - ensure it has a long entrance to prevent cats and dogs from getting their paws inside.





# Willow Tit



Since the 1970s this bird has declined in the UK by 94%. They are present in the Tamar Valley with promising signs that they are extending their limited range by following the vegetation along the streams. It's now time to help this bird recover by creating more habitat where they can flourish.

**Habitat:** Damp and wet woodland.

**Best spot to see them:** Cotehele National Trust woodland.

**Top tips:** The Willow Tit can be differentiated to the Marsh Tit by its buzz-like call.

**How to help:** The Willow Tit is shy and prefers to travel within wooded areas, compared to open ground. Planting trees and connecting wooded habitats near streams and rivers extends the Willow Tit's range. Installing bird boxes, especially in damp wooded areas would be very beneficial to the Willow Tit and other bird species.



# Harvest Mouse



Harvest Mice are iconic countryside creatures who are usually very elusive. They are the only British mammal who have a prehensile tail and can use it as another limb.

**Habitat:** Grassland & hedgerows.

**Best spot to see them:** Cotehele National Trust wetlands and orchards.

**Top tips:** Look in long grasses for them, though you are more likely to spot their woven ball-shaped nests.

**How to help:** Harvest mice live in long grass and along hedgerows and their favourite foods are fruit and insects. Plant native fruit-providing trees in hedgerows instead of using fencing. In gardens and community spaces, leave patches of grass to grow long which provides nesting material and cover. In fields, increase margins around edges by restricting grazing.



# Greater Horseshoe Bat

The Greater Horseshoe Bat is one of the rarest bats in the UK with a characteristic horseshoe shaped nose. The lower Tamar River is a stronghold and an important maternity roost.

**Habitat:** Orchards, hedgerows, woodland edges and mining sites.

**Best spot to see them:** Along woodland edges, particularly around Tamar Trails and Gunnislake between April and October.

**Top tips:** Greater Horseshoe Bats leave their roosts 10 minutes after sunset. A bat detector is available to borrow from the Tamar Valley Centre to hear them and other bat species in our area.

**How to help:** Greater Horseshoe Bats feed on flying insects such as moths and flies. Plant a few trees in and around grassland areas to provide food for their prey. Do not use pesticides as these reduce the bats' food sources.



# Plymouth Pear



One of Britain's rarest trees, the Plymouth Pear is thought to exclusively be found in the hedgerows around Plymouth. It is a fantastic source of for wildlife, but the flowers smell terrible!

**Habitat:** Hedgerow

**Best spot to see them:** Derriford Hospital car park in Plymouth.

**Top tips:** The distinctive smell of the flowers which blossom at the end of April/beginning of May give this tree away. The smell has been described as wet carpet or decaying scampi.

**How to help:** There are very few Plymouth Pear trees available to purchase. So if you cannot find a tree to purchase and plant in a hedgerow, the next best thing is to grow plenty of native flowers for pollinators which may help pollinate the Plymouth Pear trees existing in our hedgerows.





# Bastard Balm



Within the mint family, this square-stemmed plant has beautiful pink and white pea-like flowers which act as a landing strip for pollinators. Bees, especially favour the plant.

**Habitat:** Woodland & hedgerow.

**Best spot to see them:** Greencoombe Woods Nature Reserve.

**Top tips:** Bastard Balm is a shade-loving plant which grows tall, so look out for it swaying in the breeze along woodland edges.

**How to help:** Bastard Balm struggles in grazed areas, so restrict ponies and livestock grazing right to the edge of woodland. Scrub clearance and regular coppicing helps to prove the right environment for this plant to thrive.

# Further Resources

Tamar Valley National Landscape - Invasive Species



Hedgehog Street

Westcountry Rivers Trust - Citizen Science



Butterfly Conservation

Freshwater Habitats Trust



The Peoples Trust for Endangered Species

Ocean Conservation Trust



RSPB - Royal Society for the Protection of Birds



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