



**Somerset**  
Wildlife Trust

# The Big Count 2024

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17th - 26th June



## Thank you so much for taking part in The Big Count 2024!

The shocking outlook delivered by last year's Somerset State of Nature report left us in no doubt as to the situation of species decline in Somerset and the UK. A report from Germany in 2019 regarding the apocalyptic decline in the abundance of insects also adds an acute recognition that, in focussing purely on species extinction, there is a risk that significant trends about the state of nature could be missed over time.

We know how absolutely vital it is that we understand what is happening to wildlife on a county and local scale both in terms of the biodiversity (the kinds of species) and bioabundance (the number) of species in order to make the best decisions for nature's recovery - and to deliver the right natural solutions for climate change and people.

We have over 3 million species records in Somerset but the majority are about protected or rare species mostly within good quality habitats. There's a real gap in our knowledge about how we perceive (though not necessarily true) the more 'common' species are doing on a wider scale across the county.

### What is the Big Count?

The Big Count is part of our Great Somerset Wildlife Count initiative - Somerset Wildlife Trust's annual programme of citizen science species counts across the county. We run counts for single species or small groups of species but the Big Count is the big one!

Once a year we ask everyone to keep their eyes peeled for a handful of species over an extended period of time for The Big Count! This year we want you to keep your eyes peeled between 17th and 26th June.

Thank you for downloading this FREE pack, filled to the brim with information on how to take part. We want as many people to join in as possible, from individuals, families, schools, businesses and more so please do spread the word far and wide. Last year we had an amazing 1,236 observations from 197 observers - a number we'd love to push higher for 2024!

*Thank you for taking part!*

## How to take part



**Step 1** - You've already taken the first step by downloading this pack...thank you!

**Step 2** - Create an iNaturalist account via the web page or by downloading the iNaturalist or Seek app on your mobile device.

We've chosen to collect wildlife data for all the counts for the Great Somerset Wildlife Count using this brilliant platform. It's really easy to use and once you have set up an account and joined the Great Somerset Wildlife Count project, you can see all our other counts - including last year's Big Count 2023. Download the app on your phone and you can be popping in your sightings on the go!

### Via the webpage



- Go to [www.inaturalist.org](http://www.inaturalist.org)
- Click on the Sign Up button
- You can create a username and password specifically for iNaturalist or sign in with a social media account
- If you want to just take part in the Big Count for now, using the search bar, search for it and then click 'join' the project. If you think you might like to see all the counts we run during the year, search for and sign up to the Great Somerset Wildlife Count project too as this will host all of our counts in one place. Then you can submit your sightings and photos between the 17th and 26th June.

### Downloading the app

You can go through the same process by downloading the iNaturalist app. Don't forget - you can create an account with the Seek app also if you prefer.

**Step 3** - Get counting! Do as many counts as you can in different places and encourage as many people as you can to do the same. There's nothing like a bit of healthy competition - how about getting your whole street to take part and check out each others sightings on the map!

### Need some help?

We know that getting the hang of new platforms and apps can sometimes be confusing for some, but we're here to help make things easy. Visit The Big Count 2024 pages on the Somerset Wildlife Trust website and you will find a number of helpful videos we've created to guide you through it all.

### Where to look?

On the next page you can find out when and where you can find the various species we would like you to count!



### **Goldfinch**

What a colourful and social bird this is. Often breeding in loose colonies it can be easy to spot with its red face and yellow wing patch. They're one of the countryside/farmland bird species that's successfully transitioned to gardens due to bird seed and us feeding them. Seeing them in gardens is great, but if we can also tie in these records with those seen in the wider countryside, we could get an indication of wild seed abundance such as from teasels. Will these birds move back into farmland with a change of practice over time?



### **Birds-foot trefoil**

A member of the pea family, common birds-foot trefoil is one of the many wildflowers that would have made up the plant communities in these grassland ecosystems. It has a variety of names that conjure up some interesting images: 'Eggs and Bacon', as one great example. The seed pods look like bird's feet or claws, hence the common name, and its yellow flowers look like little slippers and appear in small clusters. It can still be seen in all kinds of grassy places and is a very distinguishable and easy to identify flowering plant. Not only is it pretty to see, it is a key part of food webs, providing food for bees and butterflies.



### **Dragonfly/Damselfly**

Dragonflies and damselflies are large freshwater insects and as such, they are regarded as good indicators of both climate change and the condition of our wetlands. The north of England and Scotland have seen increases in numbers while the south has greater diversity. With water quality and pollution issues in Somerset being of concern, these make an excellent group of species to observe over time. Seeing these in urban environments will also indicate that good quality, viable water sources are nearby. We just need you to record them all! You can take a picture and send it in with your sighting or use Seek to help with identification before you log the record.





## Fungi

They can appear in any season if conditions are right, though you'd be correct in thinking they are more likely to be seen in summer and autumn.

Despite the efforts of a few pioneering scientists, the general scientific community is only just starting to realise the fundamental importance of fungi to our ecosystems, especially soils. Taking pictures and using photo tools will enable you to stay safe from touching the wrong ones and us to gain a greater understanding of this under-recorded group. We have a real opportunity to discover the diversity in our county.



## Snails

Being low in the food chain, they are an important part of ecosystems, converting nutrients such as calcium from rotting vegetation, soil and fungi into their bodies and shells, which are then fed upon by a wide variety of other species – so from that perspective it's important we monitor populations. We tend to ignore snails, and we don't have many records of them, but as with some of the other species, they are easy to photograph, and using Seek can to help identify them.



## Speckled wood, small tortoiseshell, common blue, marbled white

Together these butterflies represent a mix of species that people might expect to find close to home or in the near countryside. They are easy to identify and, though reasonably common, they are important to monitor as declines will indicate something is seriously afoot. Speckled wood like dappled shade, slightly damp conditions and are found in gardens, hedgerows and woodlands – with climate change, we could see populations changing. Similarly, the colourful small tortoiseshell is common in gardens and needs stinging nettles. The common blue is still common, likes grasslands and mainly feeds on birds-foot trefoil, while the marbled white is very distinctive and loves neutral grassland – a priority habitat that, like many grasslands has declined in the last 70 years.





### **Slow worm**

One of the longest living reptiles in the world, these legless lizards are one of just a few species of reptile found all across Somerset and the UK. Due to habitat loss, they are now more commonly seen in gardens and allotments, often hiding in the warm under a log or compost heap. If you're not a fan of slugs, snails, or spiders, then slow worms are your friend! They will happily munch on these, along with all sorts of other invertebrates. They themselves are an important food source for many birds, snakes and even mammals such as badgers and hedgehogs. It's important to remember that they are protected by law from being deliberately killed, injured or sold/traded in any way. Avoid picking them up as they can release very smelly poop or even 'drop' their tails as a defence when alarmed.



### **Spiders**

It's odd but some people don't like spiders. They, like bats, stop our world from being overrun by flies. They also protect our food crops and are an important food source in the food chain for many other animals. They are a difficult group to identify and there are only two people in the county who do it regularly. We have so few logged sightings of spiders and their allies like the harvestmen. Often very colourful and with detailed patterns, this overlooked group can be found everywhere. Did you know some spiders change colour depending on the flower they are hiding in?



### **Bullfinch**

Usually found in woodlands and hedgerows this distinctive bird is being seen more frequently in gardens. In Somerset we are lucky that our homes tend not to be far from the countryside and they are attracted in by food. Feeding in the spring on tree buds the brightly coloured males are easy to spot. It is currently listed as of conservation concern and on the Amber List for birds. Spotting these and monitoring their numbers will help in the development of wildlife corridors within our urban environments.

## Need more resources to help you identify The Big Count species as well as some others you might find along the way?



See these additional resources below:

- Countryside Butterflies Spotter Guide
- Woodland Butterflies Spotter Guide
- Garden Butterflies Spotter Guide
- Fungi Spotter Guide
- Garden Minibeast Spotter Guide
- Woodland Wildlife (Summer) Spotter Guide



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The Big Count is part of our Great Somerset Wildlife Count initiative - Somerset Wildlife Trust's annual programme of citizen science species counts across the county. We run counts for single species or small groups of species but the Big Count is the big one.

If we don't notice wildlife declines, we run the risk of losing species forever. There's gaps in our knowledge that we need your help to fill.

Through our **Team Wilder** programme, we run a number of seasonal community science initiatives as part of our **Great Somerset Wildlife Count** initiative, delivered in partnership with the Trust's environmental records centre, **SERC**, that aim to fill those gaps. Evidence says that if we get 1 in 4 people taking visible action for nature we create a social 'tipping point' - a magic moment when a social behaviour (in our case the pro-nature kind) moves the masses do the same.

We need your help to tip the balance in nature's favour. We need you to join Team Wilder - people taking action for nature across the county that they care about; doers, movers, shakers, ambassadors, campaigners and changemakers. Because only together can we bring about the change that nature needs! Get stuck in by looking at our Team Wilder resources, [here](#).

We also provide training to help more people develop recording and monitoring skills. **Thank you for being our eyes and ears on the ground!**



# Countryside Butterflies



Meadow brown



Common blue



Ringlet



Gatekeeper



Small copper



Wall brown



Brown argus



Clouded yellow



Small heath



Large skipper



# Woodland Butterfly Spotter wildlife watch



Speckled wood



Pearl-bordered fritillary



Purple emperor



Grizzled skipper



Duke of Burgundy



Silver-washed fritillary



Brown hairstreak



Purple hairstreak



High brown fritillary



Wood white



# Garden butterflies



Peacock



Brimstone



Comma



Orange-tip



Green-veined white



Holly blue



Small tortoiseshell



Painted lady



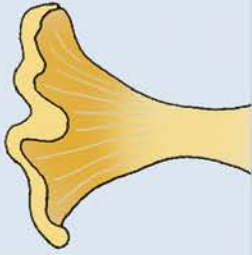
Red admiral



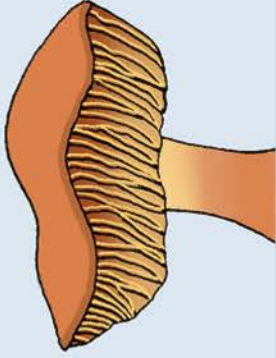
Small white

# Fungi identification

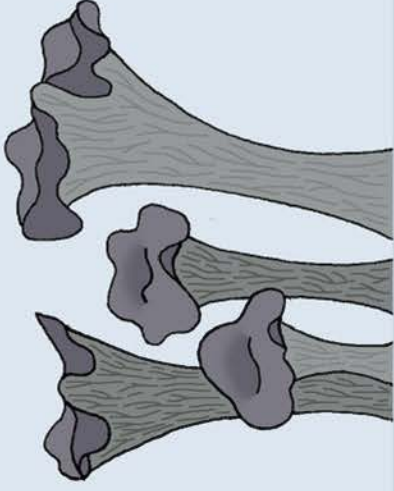
NEVER  
pick and eat  
wild mushrooms  
unless you're  
with a qualified  
expert who has  
told you it  
is safe.



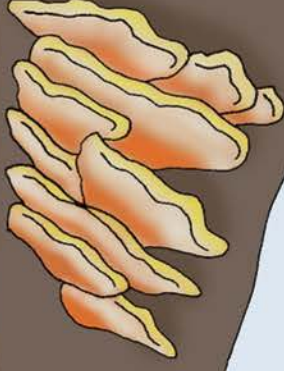
Chanterelle



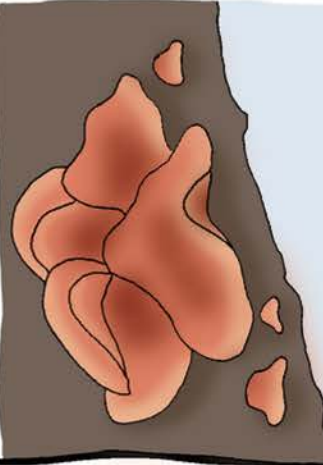
Waxcap



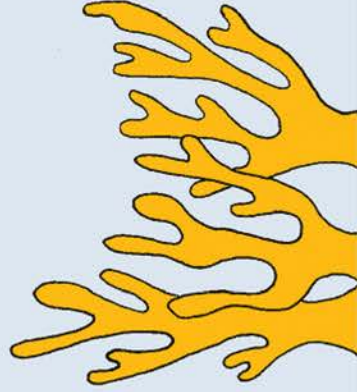
Horn of plenty



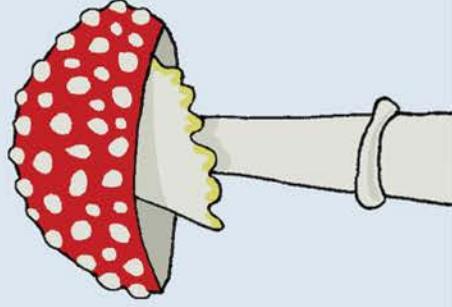
Chicken of the woods



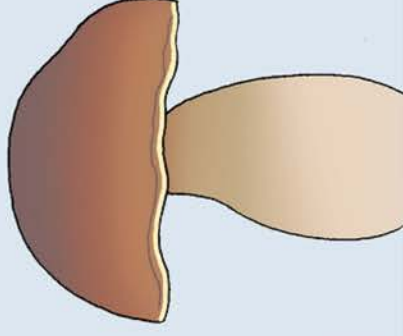
Jelly ear fungus



Yellow stagshorn



Fly agaric



Cep

# Garden minibeasts



Spider



Earthworm



Wasp



Ladybird



Snail



Butterfly



Earwig



Bumblebee



Shieldbug



Hoverfly

# Woodland wildlife in summer



Speckled wood



Chaffinch



Wood warbler



Roe deer



Sparrowhawk



Grass snake



Wood-sorrel



Treecreeper



Spotted flycatcher



Common lizard