

Field Meeting to Exmouth, Devon

27–28th. September 2003

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Regular field meeting fans will recall past occasions when the lowest tides of the year have brought heavy squalls and, torrential rain. This time we were lucky, as a long hot summer had stretched into a golden autumn.

The two principal sites chosen for collection were Dawlish Warren on the first day and Budleigh Salterton on the second, respectively the western and eastern shores of the Exe River estuary in South Devon. The Warren is a stretch of vegetation-covered sand dunes 1 1/2 miles long which is occupied partly by a golf course, partly by a nature reserve, and at the western end by a funfair which fortunately closes down out of the tourist season. On the seaward side there is a wide shallow sandy beach with a number of lagoons and offshore sandbanks, and on the estuary side there is a muddy bay where brackish water species can be found.

Sixteen members gathered in the car park around noon on the Saturday and set out in small groups to see what we could find. Alas, the beneficent weather over a long period had allowed the river to scour the estuary and much of the sand cover had been removed to expose banks of underlying pebbles and grit. This much reduced the availability and quality of the species we discovered. Moreover many of the regular finds from past years were simply not available this time, for example *Helcion peltucidum*, *Gibbulo magus*, *Gari depresso* and *Scrobicularia plana*. The search on the estuarine site produced the expected species but very little else. Please see the attached table for a full list of finds.

The following afternoon 17 people gathered in the car park beside the River Otter at Budleigh Salterton with a view to searching the estuarine salt marsh (with kind, permission from the Devon Wildlife Trust who manage the estuary as a nature reserve) and the rocky reefs standing out of the pebbly foreshore. Participants divided into two groups, one of which included Dr Mary Seddon and some young staff from the National Museum of Wales being taken to study the marsh by our guest leader, Dr David Bolton, the Curator of Natural History at the Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter. However due to a misunderstanding Dr Bolton

led the party to the meadows and dykes on the western side of the nature reserve instead of into the salt marsh proper as had been intended. In fact a member of the marine group did search a small stretch of the salt marsh later in the afternoon and drew a blank, probably due to the long spell of dry weather. Meanwhile the marine group had crossed the River Otter at White Bridge and proceeded down the eastern side of the estuary in order to gain access over the cliffs to the reefs on the beach. Two members climbed down the cliff of a small bay to a beach of tumbled boulders and searched there, but it appeared that the cliff path which used to lead to the main beach had been eroded recently. Finding no access to the shore, this group returned to Exmouth instead and searched the sandy bay and rock shelves around Orcombe Point. This area has been rather neglected by previous field meeting groups and turned out to be quite prolific. Four members staying on in Exmouth studied it again the following day and found additional species which have been included, in the list which follows. Luckily Dr Rupert Honnor did follow the recommendation to bring waders and was able to cross easily the knee-deep and turbulent River Otter and spend several hours examining the main reef.

Details of the finds from all the sources have been gathered together by John Llewellyn Jones and Celia Pain who has kindly produced a full list of species. Should any member wish to examine the salt marsh at Budleigh Salterton in more propitious weather, as a member of the Devon Wildlife Trust I would be glad to arrange a fresh permit and supply transport to the site.