

Nature's Calendar

Winter



Winter in the South Hams can be relatively mild compared to other places: now's the time to enjoy bracing coastal walks and watch the huge waves crash against the beaches.

December

Once the leaves have fallen from the trees, the lichens that festoon the branches become clearer. Look at how many different types there are on one tree.

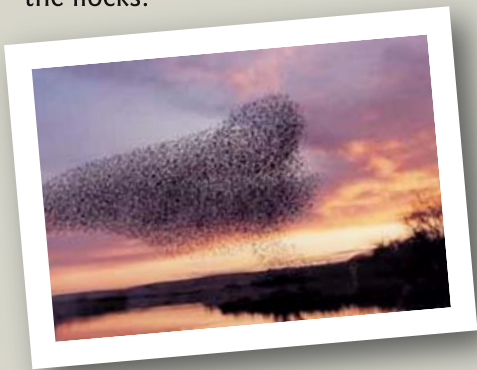
Visit any large reed bed just before dusk to watch the magnificent spectacle of flocks of starlings as they reel around the sky in cloud-like formations before dropping down into the reedbed to roost overnight. Predators such as sparrowhawk or peregrine add to the drama as they dive through and scatter the flocks.



January

Look for gorse in flower as the saying goes 'Kiss your lover when the gorse is in flower', (you should be able to see it flowering at anytime of the year even in January!) Now's a good time to look for different gulls, they tend to group together in mixed flocks along the coast. Look out for waders too - dunlin and oystercatchers are common.

Listen for the 'barwk barwk' of the raven as they glide through the air, sometimes tumbling acrobatically. It is mating time for foxes so listen out for their eerie screeching at night.



Left - starlings; **From top** - start bay lighthouse; peregrine; **Far top right** - raven



Common, herring, black backed and black headed gulls

February

Look out for the first snowdrops and the heart-shaped leaves of the celandines with their star-like yellow flower, these show that winter is coming to an end. A sunny day in February can coax butterflies such as brimstone, peacock and tortoiseshells out of hibernation. Badgers become more active and begin gathering bedding material ready for giving birth. Rooks are early nesters, watch them begin to collect sticks to repair their old nests. Listen out for the greater spotted woodpecker's fast drumming, they do this to attract a mate. At night tawny owls become very vocal as they begin to set up territory, try and distinguish the 'kewick and twooh' of two birds calling to each other.



Wildlife Hot Spots for winter



Slapton Ley OS SX 827 443

This is a good place to visit for an all-round winter experience, get there before dusk and watch up to 50,000 starlings come to roost.

South Milton OS SX 677 418 and Beesands Ley OS SX 819 410

These are smaller reedbeds than Slapton but still attract a good number of starlings.



Top - tawny owl © Morguefile - Derek Lilly;
From left - dunlin; lichen; snowdrops
 Photos by Jayne Morris, Clare Morris and David Hackford