

Spotter's Guide



A useful aid whilst out in the car or walking along the Devon lanes

Birds

What's the difference between house martins, sand martins, swifts and swallows?



Swallow (left): This bird has long tail streamers and a red face.

Swift (right): This is a sickle-shaped bird which flies high in the sky often accompanied by high pitched screaming, particularly around buildings.

House martin (left): Nests on houses and has a white rump.

Sand martin (right): Smaller than a house martin with brown plumage and no white rump. Both martins have shorter, stubbier tails than swallows and swifts.

What's the difference between birds of prey?

Buzzard: A large bird with wide wings and finger-like feathers at the end and quite a wide rounded tail. Buzzards are often seen sitting on telegraph polls. They vary greatly in colour, in general the paler the bird, the younger it is.

Peregrine: Streamlined bodies and pointed wings – can reach speeds of up to 180 mph in a dive.

Sparrow hawk: Wings are relatively short, broad and blunt with a longish tail. They have a characteristic flight patten of powerful bursts of several wing beats which they then keep outstretched - flap flap glide.

Kestrel: The smallest of the four with pointed wings and a longish tail which broadens at the tip. Often seen hovering over road sides and farm land.

Check out these four silhouettes -



Buzzard



Peregrine



Sparrow hawk



Kestrel

Insects



What's the difference between dragonflies and damselflies?

Dragonflies (above) have broad bodies and at rest leave their wings out to their side.

Damselflies (right) are thin-bodied and more delicate. At rest they fold their wings together.



What's the difference between a moth and a butterfly?

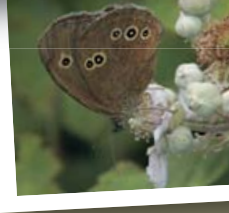
In general butterflies are day-flying and moths are night-flying, although there are a few exceptions such as the day-flying burnet and cinnabar moth.

Butterflies fold their wings up to hide their colour, whereas moths' wings are folded down showing their colour.

Butterflies have clubbed antennae whilst moths don't.

As with all rules there are always exceptions!

After a car journey, check the front of the car - you may have picked up some unlucky passengers, a dragonfly, butterfly or even a damsel maybe stuck in the grill!



From top -
6-spot burnet moth;
ringlet butterfly

Night time driving

You have a good chance of seeing a badger or a fox at night whilst driving. If you do come across an animal, dip your headlights, stop, watch and enjoy. Let the animal move away at its own speed. Badgers in particular use the same paths each night.

When you see a pair of eyes in your headlights check the colour; red eye shine means it's a cat, green eye shine a fox. Also look out for owls, in places

where the banks are tree-lined you may see a tawny owl sitting or where there are wide grass verges a barn owl may be quartering.

In the springtime and on damp warm evenings through the summer months, look for frogs and toads out on the road. At spawning time, toads in particular will be seen in large numbers on roads as they use the same route every year to reach their spawning grounds.