Coastal Oak Woodland

The North Devon Coast AONB contains a wide variety of habitats, including sand dunes and estuaries, rocky shores, species-rich hedgerows, coastal oak woodlands and culm grasslands.

Aside from the two species of oak and their intermediates, other common and characteristic trees of oak woodland are birch, rowan, hazel and holly. The ground flora of oak woodland is generally rich in mosses and ferns, sometimes joined by species such as great woodrush in coastal woods. Lower lying oak woodland on level ground is often carpeted more by bracken and bramble, with richer soils producing bluebell, ramsons and dogs mercury.The acid soils and relatively high humidity of oak woodland, especially on higher ground, gives rise to very diverse assemblages of lichens and mosses, which require continuity of conditions, and clean air to thrive. A rich invertebrate fauna is most conspicuously represented by the large mounds of wood ant nests and by butterflies like silver-washed fritillary, and the canopy dwelling purple hairstreak. The bird community of oak woodlands is characteristic, with breeding pied flycatcher, wood warbler and redstart, and a range of common mammals such as badgers and squirrels.

Bog mosses are also frequent and open pools support marsh, St John’s-wort, bog-bean, marsh pennywort, bog pondweed and other aquatic plants.

This rich variety of flowering plants supports an equally rich insect fauna. Butterflies are especially prominent, with species like marbled white and small pearl-bordered fritillary being quite common, despite their scarcity in the countryside as a whole. Dragonflies and damselflies are frequent, with keeled skimmer and golden-ringed dragonfly being especially prominent.

Typical birds of Culm pasture include breeding and wintering snipe, barn owl and short-eared owl, reed bunting, willow tit, grasshopper warbler and woodcock. Common countryside animals like fox and deer find particular shelter on Culm pasture, while many sites are closely associated with watercourses supporting otter populations. The scrubby margins of many sites support dormice.