**RSPB Aylesbeare Common Reserve**



# **July 2015 newsletter**

Our Big Wild Sleepout event is only a couple of weeks away and runs from Saturday 8th – Sunday 9th August. It is a fantastic opportunity to connect with the heathland and experience the sights and sounds of the night. The weekend of fun and adventure will commence with a guided walk, followed by a day spent adding wattle and daub to our Iron Age roundhouse. We will track down the mysterious creatures that emerge as the sun falls– listening out for the eerie churr of the nightjar, the piercing calls of tawny owls, and looking for moths, bats and glow worms. Booking is essential and more details can be found on the reserve website:

http://www.rspb.org.uk/discoverandenjoynature/seenature/events/details.aspx?id=tcm:9-403480

This is the peak time of year for dragonflies, damselflies and butterflies. Arguably our most fussy resident is the Southern damselfly. Their rather specific habitat requirements consist of slow-moving, base-rich runnels and streams within acid heathland areas, meaning we are able to accommodate one of the few small colonies found in the UK. They can also be found on two other sites across the Pebblebed heaths – at Colaton Ralleigh Common, which is under the fine management of the Pebblebed Heaths Conservation Trust and on the Devon Wildlife Trust side of Venn Ottery Common. They can be distinguished from azure damselflies by their dainty, less meaningful flight as well as the distinct mercury mark on the second abdominal segment which supposedly resembles the winged-helmet of Mercury, the Roman deity.

Join us on 13th August for our ‘Aylesbeare’s buzzing’ walk around the reserve on the look out for butterflies, dragonflies, damselflies and anything else that flies! Again, more details can be found on the reserve website.

August is the last opportunity to catch a sighting of the red listed nightjar before they migrate back to their African wintering grounds. At dusk and dawn these nocturnal birds can be seen hawking for insects – moths, beetles and crane flies are favourites - and the male’s far reaching ‘churring’ song can be heard across the heathlands.

The heather is in bloom creating a spectacular carpet of purple across the heathland. Three species of heather grow on the heathland - bell heather (*Erica cinerea*) and ling (*Calluna vulgaris*) can be found on the drier areas and cross-leaved heath (*Erica tetralix*) on the damper parts. It’s worth taking a close look at the pink, bell shaped flowers of the cross-leaved heath to really appreciate how pretty they are. The same can be said of a few other species in flower at the moment. If you venture out to the wetter bits of the heath you will be rewarded with bright yellow spikes of bog asphodel, dainty pale butterwort flowers and the self-pollinating sundew.