

Four wildlife trails in the parish of Chardstock

WALK 2 – VILLAGE WALK

This is a quick tour of the edge of Chardstock village.

Distance: 1.6km (1 mile); half an hour

The walk starts at St Andrew's Church at Chardstock (ST309044).
Walk back into the village.

1. Several old walls in the village have small tough ferns growing in them, making use of the lime-rich mortar between the chert stones where they have not been re-pointed with hard mortar. Most are maidenhair spleenwort, which is abundant in the churchyard wall and nearby, and rusty-back fern grows a few metres downhill of the church gate by the road. On the church itself, wall rue can be seen where high gutters leak, especially on the south side. On damp walls everywhere in the village, ivy-leaved toadflax scrambles out of cracks.

Take the road right to Alston, first left at the bend, and first right after 100m.

2. This is Egg Moor Lane, which sits on the spring-line where greensand overlies less permeable rocks (clay or perhaps Jurassic mudstone). It's always wet here and plants that need saturated soil with water seeping through it do well, such as the giant gunnera from South America and great horsetail (very frondy, 'black and white' stems).

Follow the footpath through the gate into the field.

3. The field has two stock-proof hedge plants, first hawthorn with prickly stems then a length of prickly-leaved solid holly.

Turn down by the plantation.

4. The conifer plantation here has deciduous larch – more obvious in winter when it has lost its needles – as well as Sitka spruce (wavy scales on its cones), Scots pine (bark with orange patches) and Douglas fir. You can usually find the cones of these trees on the path.

Turn right up the lane, and left into the field just past the houses.

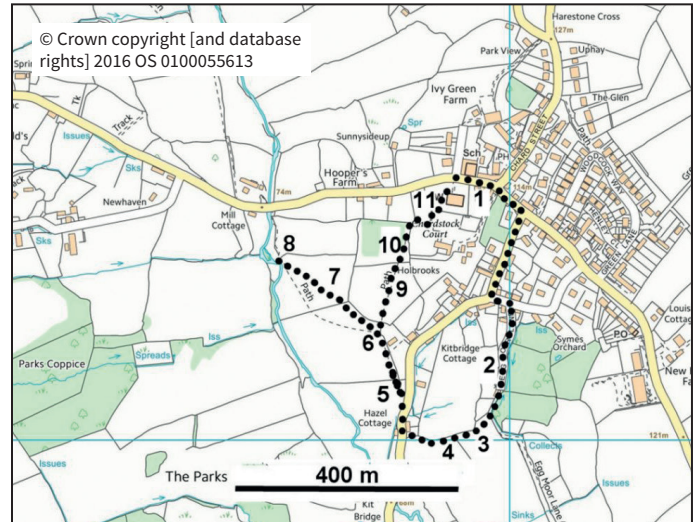


Scots pine

5. These fields are fairly well fertilised, helping grass but not the herbs, leaving just common plants like daisy, dandelion and buttercup. Looking down the valley, the River Kit has just reached an embryonic floodplain and has a chance to meander just a little.

Keep to the hedge at the top of the hill, stopping just before the gate ahead. Ignore the path through the gate and start off downhill.

6. Across the valley you can see the alders snaking along the River Kit, many large oaks and ash in the hedgerows, and the undulating topography presumably moulded by small streams. Looking closer, the gappy hedge on your right has some large beech with smooth bark, old oak with fissured bark, and smaller hazel and field maple. In the hedge running down the tiny trickle are three old sycamores with smooth bark like the beech.



7. The field you enter as you cross the little trickle is a County Wildlife Site, special because of its abundance of flowers. You can see lots of leaf rosettes, even in winter, the fronded leaves of pignut in spring and the nearly identical burnet-saxifrage later in the season – neither to be confused with the white-flowered yarrow, which has more fern-like leaves. Light cattle-grazing is important to keep these plants growing well, even if their flowers are eaten off.

8. As you get near the stream, the ground gets wetter and different plants – such as brooklime – appear. Ramsons grow along the banks, indicating that there are lime-rich rocks here.

Retrace your steps up the hill and go through the gate that we saw earlier.

9. The splendid solitary silver birch was almost certainly planted. Birch are uncommon in this part of the parish compared to Bewley Down.

10. Another conifer plantation has Norway spruce (stiff short needles) and Douglas fir (softer, longer needles, cones with a three-pointed 'tongue'). Not much other than nettles grows below them in the soil made acid by their dead needles.

Head to the corner and walk between the stone walls to the churchyard.

11. You can wander around the well kept churchyard. Both huge and tiny interesting plants live here. Cedar of Lebanon has a flat top, while the deodar (another type of cedar) next to the path is pointed. In the top corner is the traditional churchyard yew, probably not particularly old. Plenty of flowers grow in the grass, including spring primroses and celandines. The church wall is made of Ham stone quoins with chert infill; lichens grow only on the Ham limestone. Lichens also don't like the granite headstones but cover those made of sandstone and limestone. In spring, nesting rooks make a racket in the tall trees in neighbouring Chardstock Court. Signs of five species of bats have been found in the church.