

The New Forest

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

- Day 1** Meet in the evening, after dinner excursion.
- Day 2** Bolderwood, Acres Down, Holly Hatch.
- Day 3** Islands Thorn Enclosure, Bishop's Dyke, Beaulieu Heath, Denny Wood. Depart for home mid-afternoon.

Departs

May

Focus

General Natural History of the New Forest

Grading

Grade A –easy day walks.

Dates and Prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code GBR07)

Highlights:

- Dusk displays of Woodcock and Nightjar
- Crossbill, Stonechat, Redstart and Firecrest
- The New Forest is home to half the British population of Dartford Warbler
- Roe, Fallow, Red and Sika Deer
- Listen to rare species of bats calling at dusk
- Led by an expert naturalist



From top to bottom: Dartford Warbler, the New Forest and Honey Buzzard



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Introduction

The New Forest is one of the most important ecological areas in Britain. It comprises a vast area of rolling heathland, mixed forest and damp boggy hollows, covering some 144 square miles of south-west Hampshire and south-east Dorset. 'The Forest', as it is known locally, is still managed under a pastoral system, incorporating ancient grazing rights and periodic controlled burnings of the heathland. Indeed, it is this age old form of management that has both created and conserved the New Forest's unique ecological richness and diversity.

Over the past 150 years Britain has lost almost 80% of its lowland heathland and today the New Forest holds the largest and most important area remaining in the country. As a result it contains a huge variety of rare species of plants and animals. Amongst the insects, dragonflies, moths and butterflies are particularly well represented whilst five of the six British reptiles occur here, including the rare Smooth Snake and Sand Lizard. Roe, Fallow, Red and Sika Deer all graze the woodland edges and in terms of birds, the New Forest holds an unparalleled range of scarce breeders. These include over half of the total British population of Dartford Warblers, plus Woodlark, Willow Warbler, Crossbills, Nightjars and raptors such as Hobby, Goshawk and Honey Buzzard. There is also a rich variety of plants, especially in the damper areas of heathland.

Itinerary

Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Meet Forest Lodge Hotel

We will meet at our hotel for an evening meal and subsequent drinks in the bar, providing the chance to get to know everyone. For those who wish to venture out we will take a drive and then walk out over the surrounding heathland in search of singing Nightjars and roding (displaying) Woodcocks. Dusk is also a good time of the day to see the New Forest's bumper population of Fallow Deer which venture out of the woodlands to feed.

Day 2

Following yesterday's late night we will take a leisurely breakfast before driving the short distance to Acres Down, a high ridge of open heathland overlooking the mass of woodland that extends south-west across the New Forest. On the way we will make a quick stop at Bolderwood, an area of dense, mixed forest and ornamental woodland that supports a small, and often highly elusive, breeding population of the tiny Firecrest. This is a rare breeding species for which the Forest has become renowned; indeed Bolderwood is the site where the species was proved breeding for the first time ever in Britain (during the 1960s).

Acres Down itself holds all the characteristic New Forest woodland species, but our attention here should be overhead for this site has long been renowned as the best vantage point in the New

Forest from which to see birds of prey. By sitting and looking over the vast expanse of forest around us we have a good chance of seeing Hobby, Sparrowhawk and Buzzard as they hunt above the tree tops. We may even be lucky enough to see a Honey Buzzard, one of the New Forest's rarest breeding birds. Honey Buzzards are late migrants, but have usually arrived by mid-May and at this time of year they often engage in their dramatic aerial displays. Raptor activity reaches a peak at around mid-morning in hot, calm conditions so we will hope for ideal weather conditions for our visit here. After lunch in a nearby pub, we will drive to the northern portion of the forest and take a walk in an area known as Holly Hatch. Here we will look for woodland birds such as Redstart, Lesser-spotted Woodpecker and perhaps Hawfinch. If time permits, we may venture down to Beaulieu Road Station late in the afternoon to look for Hobby. These graceful falcons often hunt dragonflies over the bogs and are best seen late afternoon and early evening.

Day 3

We will make an early morning start today to get to Islands Thorn Enclosure for around 6.30am. This is a large tract of broad-leaved woodland, near Fritham village on the north side of the Forest and holds a good variety of breeding warblers and other birds. The early morning sounds could include the occasional hoot of a Tawny Owl. There are also good numbers of Redstarts and other more common woodland species, as well as the more elusive Hawfinches and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers. Eyeworth Pond, which is situated at a site where gunpowder was produced, sometimes plays host to the attractive Mandarin Duck which breed ferally in the vicinity. The open heath nearby has such typical heathland species as Tree Pipit, Woodlark and Stonechat, as well as Dartford Warblers.

Returning to the hotel for breakfast, we will leave an hour or so later and drive to Beaulieu Road. The Bishop's Dyke/Beaulieu Heath complex supports the widest possible variety of New Forest habitats, including wet acidic bog with willow carr, dry heath, woodland borders with grazed forest lawn and broad-leaved woodland. As such, this is one of the prime areas for many of the region's rare and localised species such as Dartford Warbler and Woodlark. Hobby is a regular sight overhead hawking for dragonflies and other insects and in the heather there is a chance of finding an Adder or a Common Lizard; we would have to be extremely fortunate, however, to locate either a Smooth Snake or Sand Lizard, two nationally endangered species that do occur here. Nearby Denny Wood holds good numbers of woodland birds, including breeding Siskins and Redpolls, all three woodpeckers, Redstart, Hawfinch, Spotted Flycatcher and many more. The damp, boggy areas around the woodland edge also support a rich plant and insect life.

We will take a quick lunch at another local pub before deciding how to spend our remaining few hours. The exact itinerary will be fairly flexible and dependent on what species we have seen and those we have missed. There are additional sites to explore for Dartford Warbler and other areas that hold both Hobby and Woodlark. Around 4/4.30pm we will depart for home.

Tour grading

There will be no serious or strenuous walking, with easy walks each of a maximum of 3 miles on gentle terrain.

Focus

The general natural history of the New Forest, birds, butterflies, plants and fungi.

Food & accommodation included in the price

Accommodation, breakfasts and dinners are included in the cost. Pub lunches and drinks are not included.

Clothing and Equipment

Binoculars are essential. Bring a telescope if you have one, since it will be useful for the raptor-watching session. Since it can be muddy underfoot we would suggest you bring walking boots, and wellingtons may be useful if the weather looks wet. It is advisable to bring some insect repellent with you which might be needed when visiting the heathlands.

Transport

We use 9-seat minibuses for this tour. Please assist our tour leaders in ensuring that there is a rotation of seats around the tour vehicle to allow each tour member to enjoy approximately equal time in the front. In order to be fair to all participants, we regret that we are unable to guarantee a perpetual front seat to those who might suffer from motion sickness or other concerns.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website.

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