

The Forest of Dean

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline Itinerary

Day 1 Arrive Speech House Hotel

Day 2/3 Explore the Forest of Dean

Departs

February and March

Focus

Birds & Other Wildlife

Grading

A. All walking will be at a slow birdwatching pace over mostly flat ground.

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code GBR47) or brochure

Highlights

- Enjoy the varied birdlife of The Forest of Dean
- Displaying Goshawks and Peregrine Falcon
- Search for Wild Boar
- Hawfinch, Brambling & Red Crossbill all targets
- Mandarin Duck and Goosander likely
- Night spotlighting for Wild Boar, Fallow Deer, Fox and Badger
- A good chance to find Great Grey Shrike
- A great number of more common woodland species and the perfect tour to learn bird song
- Excellent food from a superbly located hotel



Hawfinch, Wild Boar, Red Crossbill



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Introduction

The Forest of Dean is an area of mixed woodland covering an area in excess of 100 square kilometers. This forest is one of the last remaining ancient woodlands in the UK and plays host to a whole wealth of exciting wildlife.

On this holiday, departing in late winter/early spring, we will largely be focusing on searching for the special bird species and exciting mammals that spend the winter here. Over this short break we will take drives to various different sites across the forest and spend time on foot covering different trails with the focus on finding the special species whilst taking in whatever other wildlife we may come across.

Our comfortable hotel based in the heart of the forest, means we have very little driving to do to reach the best areas. Just around our hotel can be very rewarding as it is surrounded by excellent habitat. In the evenings there will be the option to head out in search of Wild Boar and other nocturnal wildlife on exciting night drives. This break is ideal for beginners as well as those more experienced as we will learn about every species we come across and see and hear a great range and number of species.



Wild Boar (*Sus scrofa*)

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

Arrive Speech House Hotel

Your tour leader will meet you at the lovely Speech House hotel at 6pm. Before dinner, you will have a short introductory chat outlining the programme for the next couple of days and some of the wildlife we will hope to see. There will be an optional excursion after dinner for those who wish, to try and find Wild Boar in particular along with the chance of Badger, Fox, Fallow Deer and Tawny Owl. This will be a drive around the local area.

Days 2 - 3

Explore the Forest of Dean

Over the next two full days we will visit a range of sites from our base which lies in the heart of the forest. With our ideally placed location, all the areas we shall visit are nearby and very little time on this tour is spent in a vehicle. Whilst out walking the trails we will be passing through areas of deciduous and coniferous woodland and in particular we will pay close attention to stands of Beech, Hornbeam and Larch. These can be very good for finches at this time of year when flocks can often be encountered. Two particular targets over the weekend will be the wonderful Hawfinch, the UK's largest finch, and Brambling, which can often be found in amongst Chaffinch flocks with fluctuating numbers year to year here. At stands of larch and pine we will search for roving flocks of Crossbill which favour these coniferous species. Hawfinch and Red Crossbill are found in good numbers here



Hawfinch (*Coccothraustes coccothraustes*)

at this time of year as the winter sees our breeding population boosted by migrants which often gather in flocks and hence giving us a greater chance. We have actually never yet failed to find Hawfinches or Crossbills on this tour.

There are a few accessible lakes around the forest and we will visit the best spots, which often hold wintering Mandarin Duck and also Goosander whilst the alders that

often line these areas are popular with Redpoll and Siskin. Finches around the pond will also be in more conspicuous flocks at this time of year. Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers do breed in the forest and at this time of year in particular we shall keep a keen ear out for them as they will be laying claim to their territories with both drumming and calling. A sighting would be a real bonus however!

This time of year is also the best period for seeing Goshawk. These powerful raptors breed here in good numbers and a sunny day in February or March holds the best chance as they will be displaying over their territories at this time of year. We shall visit viewpoints where we hope to watch them.

There are various rivers and streams running through the forest and along these we hope to find White-throated Dippers along with the Grey Wagtails and Marsh Tit that are often found in the wetter areas and near water courses.



White-throated Dipper (*Cinclus cinclus*)

While we will of course be aiming to find some key target species, we will be enjoying everything we encounter and the sheer number of woodland species that can be seen in winter is wonderful. Putting down some seed will soon see birds piling in with an amazing turnover. Coal, Blue and Great Tits instantly respond and Nuthatches are very common providing extremely close views. Chaffinches often appear and Marsh Tits too with the occasional beautiful Siskin. It is an ideal tour for learning more about our more widely encountered woodland species and their identification as well as seeing some of the scarcer, sought after species.

In the early morning, we can enjoy a lot of bird song with Song Thrushes, Blackbirds, Wrens, Robins, Mistle Thrushes, Chaffinches, Nuthatches and Greenfinches just some of the birds we will be hearing a lot and learning about. The lawn just outside the hotel often holds feeding Redwing at this time of year and on a sunny day they too can sometimes be heard singing as they begin to think about their migration back to breeding quarters. Each morning there will be the option for a pre breakfast walk and we will really maximize our time across the two days, without any need for rushing.

Throughout the forest there are lots of open glades and we will also explore this habitat too. In recent years up to three Great Grey Shrikes have spent the winter in the forest and we will search for this special species while enjoying anything we may come across. On previous tours we have had great success in obtaining excellent views and witnessing some special behavior. The shrikes feed on small birds, reptiles, amphibians, bees and other insects, its prey is often impaled on thorns before being eaten and any surplus prey is impaled for storage in "larders". Stonechat can often be seen in the open areas and we will be keeping an eye to the sky for Goshawks.

At some point over the two days we will also visit Symonds Yat which provides some spectacular views over the river Wye below and is a fantastic place to watch Peregrine Falcons and another excellent place to try to see Goshawks.



Northern Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*)

Although the bird life will be the main focus, we will also make a great effort to find Wild Boar. Despite their numbers now standing at around 1000 animals and quite possibly more, sightings are very unpredictable. While a day time sighting is very much

possible, we will greatly increase our chances by heading out after dark and there will be an option for night drives to increase our chances. We will drive around the roads near to our hotel and some quiet tracks with a spotlight, in the hope of finding them. We can also hope to encounter Fallow Deer and Fox with the occasional Badger sighting and a good chance for Muntjac and Roe Deer.

If we are lucky to have some fine, early spring weather we may also see the first emerging reptiles of the season with Adder and Common Lizard both possible and looked for with the right conditions for those who wish.

On our final day we will finish birding in the late afternoon and the tour will end back at the hotel in the early evening, being back at the hotel at around 5pm. We will not be travelling far from the hotel so should anyone like to leave earlier on the final day then this would be possible and please just speak to your tour leader on the tour.

Tour Grading & Focus

There will be easy walking on this holiday, covering between three and five miles per day, at a slow birdwatching pace, on largely flat ground. The tracks can sometimes be muddy and slippery at this time of year. We will spend the majority of our time during the day birdwatching and as we do so we will be on the lookout for any interesting wildlife along with appreciating the wonderful trees and beauty of the area.

Weather, Clothing & Equipment

It is always advisable to take layers and prepare for cold or mild weather. Waterproof clothing and sturdy – preferably waterproof or water-resistant – footwear is recommended in case of showers, as we could get caught in rain away from shelter. You should bring warm clothing for dawn or evening bird/boar watching excursions. Binoculars are very much advised for the tour. A telescope will be very useful if you have one but the leader will have a scope for shared use between the group.

What's Included

Breakfasts and evening meals are included in the holiday cost beginning with the evening meal on Day 1 and finishing with breakfast on Day 3. Accommodation will be at the Speech House Hotel in twin, double or single rooms, all en suite with tea/coffee making facilities and hairdryers. The tour price includes a 3-course meal on both nights and the food is a combination of modern and traditional British cooking and, where possible, uses locally sourced seasonal ingredients. Vegetarian options are available and there are three options to choose from for each course.

Lunches are not included in the cost of this tour. We will stop at a pub for lunch and, depending on weather and other factors, we may make another comfort stop during the day. Snacks, drinks and items of a personal nature are not included in the price of the tour, so you will need to make sure you have what you need during each day's programme.

Accommodation

As standard for this tour you will be allocated a room in the courtyard of the hotel. This is just outside the main building. These rooms are simple but perfectly clean and comfortable.

It is possible to upgrade your room to one in the main building and please state on booking if you are interested in this and if you would like me to look into this for you prior to booking please email tom@naturetrek.co.uk or call the office on 01962733015. Upgrades are subject to availability.

Upgrade options:

A standard room in the main hotel - £20 extra per person per night.

A four-poster courtyard room - £20 extra per person per night.



Speech House Hotel Garden

Extending Your Holiday

We are more than happy to book additional nights at the hotel for you. Please request this at the time of booking.

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. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests, at the time of booking.

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Mandarin (*Aix galericulata*) drake