

# The New Forest

Naturetrek Tour Report

17 - 19 May 2013

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Early Purple Orchid



Oak mining Bee



Pasqueflower



Eurasian Spoonbill

Report & images compiled by Jon Stokes



Naturetrek Cheriton Mill Cheriton Alresford Hampshire SO24 0NG England

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

F: +44 (0)1962 736426

E: [info@naturetrek.co.uk](mailto:info@naturetrek.co.uk)

W: [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk)

Tour Leader:	Jon Stokes	Naturetrek Naturalist
Participants:	Sandy Stewart	
	Gill Stewart	
	Wendy Langworthy	
	Gary Winn	
	Becky Pollard	
	Judith Brown	
	Martin Watts	
	Alison Watts	
	Graham Tazzyman	
	Caroline Tazzyman	
	Tony Besgrove	
	Kathy Besgrove	
	Nick Allen	
	Sue Pimentel	

## Day 1

Friday 17th May

We met at the hotel before dinner and had a discussion about the New Forest and the weekend. Then after a splendid meal, we set off for a stroll around. Our first stop was a woodland edge close to the hotel where as we walked down thought the trees, Pipistrelle Bats could be heard on the bat detector. The evening was still and mild, and Tawny Owls hooted from the trees while Curlews calls burbled over the bogs, and a Song Thrush sang his heart out from some bushes. However what was really noticeable was the low levels of bird song from any migrant birds. This has been the coldest spring for 50 years and migration from the continent has been very poor, something that was very obvious tonight. Back in the woods, an unusual bat call revealed itself to be a Barbastelle Bat, which are not infrequent in the Forest, but it was great to have one feeding above our heads.

Moving to another spot, more Tawny Owls were very apparent, many calling from the trees. As we moved out onto the heath, Woodcock grunted and squeaked overhead but the hoped for Nightjar was another of the bird species which haven't arrived this spring. Walking back, 30 or so Fallow Deer ran between the trees and we eventually returned to the hotel for a good night's rest after a very pleasant evening stroll.

## Day 2

Saturday 18th May

Saturday dawned grey but mild, which was very fortunate as the weather forecasts earlier in the week had suggested a biblical flood. Setting off, we drove through the Forest and as we travelled the sun came out. A Cuckoo flew in front of us and landed obligingly in a tree, whilst a Mistle Thrush appeared behind us. Traveling out onto an area of heathland where yesterday there had been a report of a Black Kite, we stopped to have a look - just in case!

Although the Kite wasn't present (although it was flying around the Forest most of the weekend - just not near us) other birds of prey were rising into the air on the thermal, and lots of Buzzards could be seen in a 'kettle' with many Gulls. A kettle is a tight spiral of birds on rising air, and as we watched these birds, one stood out as very different from the other Buzzards. On drooping, longer wings, here was a Honey Buzzard soaring into the blue sky, a great early start to the morning.

Our next stop was a large downland reserve on the northern edge of the Forest. Whitethroats and Lesser Whitethroats called, mixed in with the croaking of Ravens overhead. A Red Kite circled low over the grassland looking for prey, while at our feet Green Winged and Early Purple Orchids were flowering amongst the millions of Cowslips. A couple of Turtle Doves dived into scrub only revealing themselves to some of the group, whilst Grizzled and Dingy Skippers were tricky to get good views of. As we walked over the downs there are some bronze burial mounds and on two of them Pasqueflowers were flowering. These beautiful and extremely uncommon plants should not have been flowering today, as they should have been out over a month ago, so it was a great pleasure to see them. Returning back, Yellowhammers and Linnets were the most abundant birds, but a Garden Warbler did a great job of serenading us.

Lunch was a picnic on the heathland, where Jays were flying around the neighbouring treetops then we went to Bolderwood for ice cream and deer viewing. Here the Fallow deer were easily visible in the viewing meadow and overhead Siskins calls were a constant soundtrack. On a Poplar tree, we found the exceptionally rare Poplar Bracket fungus, before hearing Firecrest calling from the treetops. A visit to the reptillary allowed good views of the local reptiles and amphibians plus the local Goshawks on the TV screen. Siskins were feeding on the feeders and Goldcrests were calling from the trees, and in the gent's toilets, a beautiful Waved Umber moth was viewed in a place unfamiliar to half the group!!

Our next stop was some Scots Pine woodland in the hope of finding some Pearl Bordered Fritillaries, but the now dull sky kept them hidden. However not all was lost, as we found the rare Bog Beacon fungus whose bright orange heads were visible in the boggy ground, two rare Click Beetles - *Ampedus pomonae* and *Ampedus balteatus*, were on a cut pine stump, where the unusually named Dogs Vomit Slime Mould was the subject of many photographs. Another pretty beetle, the Two Banded Longhorn Beetle was also seen along one of the track sides.

A beautiful Wild Service Tree was our next stop, before our last stop of the afternoon. As we arrived we heard a Green Woodpecker calling, then the 'machine gun' drumming of a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker from a nearby tree. As we moved towards the tree, it flew onto a neighbouring one giving good views, before disappearing onto another tree where it wasn't visible but was drumming. Then we had Great Spotted and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers drumming from neighbouring trees, allowing for the perfect comparison between the drums of these two species plus the Green Woodpecker flew between the trees. All three species in 5 minutes – fantastic!

We then returned to the hotel for dinner, and after another good meal, some of us still had the energy to go out again. We had found a Badger set which we hoped we could stake out, but the midges became so bad that gave up and went for a walk. Two Woodcocks roded overhead and a Tawny Owl flew through the clearing.

Out on the heath there was still no sign of the Nightjars but there was a cacophony of sound. This is a colony of Marsh Frogs which have been present on the Forest for many years, however they appear to have adopted a new pond and the sound was exceptional. Finally we returned to the hotel, where we turned in for the night, tired but happy.

## Day 3

## Sunday 19th May

We started early this morning and headed for the coast. As we set off across the marshes, we heard the beautiful call of a pair of Little Ringed Plovers. These lovely birds are a specialty of the Hampshire coast in spring, and their call is equally attractive. Leaving these birds we headed down towards the lagoon. A Skylark took off but at the same time another lark landed. The guide then made his worst gaff of the weekend as the lark took off again and flew off further down the reserve. Commenting to the only client nearby that that bird looked very like a Short-toed Lark, he then started to point out Reed Warblers and Little Terns to the rest of the group, and forgot about the lark. An hour after we left the reserve, another birder confirmed the identity as a Short-toed Lark, before it eventually flew off mid-morning.

Arriving on the shore a local birder mentioned that there was a Spoonbill on a neighbouring pool. Walking down to see it, it became apparent that this was a very hungry bird, as it was feeding voraciously on the lagoon. This suggests that the bird arrived overnight from the continent, for during the time we were there it never stopped feeding, giving the whole group the best view of a Spoonbill you could hope for. Along the shore Common and Little Terns were hawking over the water, and swifts screamed overhead as they hunted for food.

After a late and hearty breakfast we set out for local woodland. Here in a rabbit hole we found one of Britain's rarest bees, the Oak Mining Bee. This globally endangered small mining bee has taken up residence in this abandoned rabbit hole, in perhaps its last location in the country. Its distribution appears to be controlled by the distribution of genetically diverse oak, as it collects oak pollen and needs a wide flowering range to increase the chances of the bees surviving, a situation that can still be found in the New Forest. The trees were also heaving this morning with birds and it was obvious that there had been a fall of migrants overnight as there were Redstarts everywhere, plus Chiffchaffs and Willow Warblers.

Next we had a look at the local population of Wild Gladioli, followed by a look at a population of Wood Crickets. Out on the heath Stonechats 'chacked' and Tree Pipits parachuted. As we walked the Marsh Frogs began to call noisily but despite valiant efforts they avoided being seen. Birdsfoot Fenugreek flowered at our feet and as we walked we managed to find a Slow Worm.

Crossing a bog, we witnessed a spectacular life and death struggle between a pair of Hobbys and a Swift. Amazingly despite concerted efforts, the Hobbys finally gave up and the Swift escaped, although it was a touch and go experience. These two Hobbys were then joined by another five with seven at once being on display at one point.

Our final stop was to look for Dartford Warblers but the harsh spring does appear to have killed many populations in the Forest and unfortunately we couldn't find any at this last site, despite a spectacular dive into the mud by one of the group, which if the world was a fairer place deserved at least Dartford for effort! Finally we returned to the hotel to say our goodbyes, after a varied and wildlife filled weekend, in good company.

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Two-banded Longhorn

## Species List

Birds (H = heard only)

	BIRD SPECIES	SCIENTIFIC NAME	May		
			17	18	19
1	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>			5+
2	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		1	1
3	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		1	2
4	Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>			1
5	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>			1
6	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>			10
7	Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>			10+
8	Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>		1	
9	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		1	
10	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		50	
11	Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>			7
12	Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>		1	1
13	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			10+
14	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	5	2	10+
15	Little Ringed plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>			3
16	Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	10+	7	10+
17	Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	2 H		
18	Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>	1	2	
19	Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	1	2	1
20	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		10+	10+
21	Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>		1	1
22	Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	1	10+	1+
23	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>		10+	10+
24	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	10+	10+	10+
25	Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>		2	
26	Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	1	1	1
27	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	10+	5	
28	Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>			10+
29	Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		1	
30	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		1	1
31	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>		1	
32	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		10+	10+
33	Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>			10+
34	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>			10+
35	Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>			10+
36	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>			10+
37	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>		10+	10+
38	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		1	1
39	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		1	10
40	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>			10+
41	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		5	5
42	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>			30
43	Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>			5
44	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>		1	5
45	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	5	5	6
46	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	10 +	10+	10+
47	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		5	
48	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>		3	1
49	Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>		10+	10+
50	Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>		5	5
51	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		10+	10+
52	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		10+	10+

	BIRD SPECIES	SCIENTIFIC NAME	May		
			17	18	19
53	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		10+	10+
54	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		1	1
55	Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>		H	
56	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>			1
57	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		10+	10+
58	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>			1
59	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>			3
60	Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		1	
61	Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>			1
62	Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		10+	10+
63	Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>			3
64	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		10+	10+
65	Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>		10+	10+
66	Carion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		10+	10+
67	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>		10+	10+
68	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		10+	10+
69	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		10+	10+
70	Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>		10+	10+
71	Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		10+	10+
72	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>			10+
73	Linnet	<i>Acanthis cannabina</i>			10+
74	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>		4	6