

# Wildlife of the Hampshire Downs

Naturetrek Tour Report

16th – 18th June 2023

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Buff-tip



Small Skipper



Lizard Orchid



Field Cow-wheat

Tour report and images by Matt Eade

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Tour participants: Matt Eade (leader) with six Naturetrek clients

## Day 1

**Friday 16th June**

Matt met the group at the Alton House Hotel, and after a short introduction to our weekend of wildlife watching in Hampshire, we settled down to a fine dinner. Swift service ensured we still had time to venture out for a post-dinner stroll. Nearby to Odiham, we spent a good 45-minutes walking the impressive Wildlife Trust reserve at Greywell. Here, despite the incessant heatwave conditions, the ground was still moist which meant there was a great showing of Southern Marsh Orchids, and also including a hybrid Southern Marsh x Common Spotted Orchid. A delightful Spotted Flycatcher posed proudly atop a tree and a few Common Swifts also flew through. Other notable plants were Marsh Thistle, Water Forget-me-not and Yellow Iris.

It was a pleasantly warm and calm evening, and it was just lovely being out in the field as the light faded. A quick jaunt to the nearby chalk stream only revealed a family of Mallard. It was a short drive back to the accommodation where we called it a day, looking forward to the weekend ahead.

## Day 2

**Saturday 17th June**

After breakfast, Matt picked up the group and drove the short distance to Naturetrek headquarters, where he had set up a moth trap the evening before. Due to the mild, calm, and cloudy conditions, there was a good catch of moths, perhaps the highlights being as follows: Lobster Moth, two Privet Hawkmoths, Green Oak Tortrix, Buff-tip, Buff Ermine, Mocha, many Shoulder-striped Wainscots, Small Magpie and a Peppered Moth – these comprising 26 of the macro species caught.

Afterwards, Matt took the group around the Naturetrek grounds and to areas of land close-by, all within easy walking distance. Meadow Browns were abundant, and we soon found our first Marbled Whites, Large Skippers and Common Blues. A young Raven also posed superbly for all to see, even at very close range. A strip of un-cut meadow held at least 30 Bee Orchids, as well as some Pyramidal Orchids, all while Yellowhammer, Whitethroat and Skylark sang away. A patch of beech woodland produced some cooked White Helleborines, but the pond certainly came up trumps, with memorable views of a perched Emperor Dragonfly; Broad-bodied Chasers and Common Blue, Azure and Blue-tailed Damselflies were also present. A few Smooth Newts and Water Boatmen added to our fantastic morning of wildlife sightings.

Lunch was enjoyed in Selbourne at a local tearooms, before we made our way to Noar Hill, where we spent the remainder of the afternoon. This site, known by many wildlife enthusiasts as being Hampshire's best site for the Duke of Burgundy, is also home to swathes of wild orchids, and we were treated to a spectacular floral display of up to six species, with Chalk Fragrant, Pyramidal and Common Spotted being the most abundant. We were delighted to find many Musk Orchid and Fly Orchid, with the former being at their very best condition. Small Blues were numerous amongst their foodplant (Kidney Vetch), and we also saw a Small Skipper, Dark Green Fritillary, many Marbled Whites, Speckled Woods and Small Heaths. Despite the heat, we were all enjoying being in such a wild place. As we walked uphill, a Firecrest

gave brief views, plus we heard several Bullfinches which remained hidden, and Mark spotted an Orange-tip caterpillar!

Due to heat, tired legs, and plans to go and see Nightjars later the same day, we made tracks back to the hotel, arriving just before 5pm, allowing plenty of time for all to freshen up and wind down after a superb day. However, the day had not ended, as after dinner, we drove to Farnham Heath (just over the border into Surrey) and enjoyed a spectacular 45-minutes in the presence of many Nightjars. Churring, wing-clapping and perched views... yet another memorable Nightjar encounter. A Dartford Warbler, a family of Stonechats, and a Lesser Swallow Prominent caterpillar (another mega find by Mark) ended the day in fine fettle.

## Day 3

## Sunday 18th June

Matt picked everyone up at 9am and ventured down to the outskirts of Portsmouth to a private, yet excellent, botanical site. Matt had kept secret what was on the menu for the morning, but all was unveiled when the tall-standing colony of Lizard Orchids showed themselves. A truly remarkable sighting and certainly one of the highlights of the weekend. Several Bee Orchids, Vipers Bugloss, Yellow Wort, Pincushion Scabious were other botanical highlights. Overhead, a Peregrine gave a sublime flypast and Kestrels were also hovering along the chalk cliffs.

We then had a fortuitous encounter with a Naturetrek leader who was keen to show us the sight for one of the UK's rarest flower – Field Cow-wheat! Only known at two locations (one being the Isle of Wight), this was an opportunity not to miss and we were delighted to find several spikes of this beautifully coloured plant – another fantastic highlight of our morning.

We then made tracks back north, stopping for a lunch and loo break, before heading to Buriton to explore the wonderful Beech forests of the chalk downs. Our first wander had us admiring many Bird's-nest Orchids, which although past their best condition, were still brilliant to see in abundance. It was pleasant to have lunch underneath the canopy in amongst the orchids.

Afterwards, we walked east along the South Downs Way to Coulters Down – a magnificent sight with yet more orchids. The walk was productive for Yellowhammers, a Whitethroat and a lone Greater Butterfly Orchid, but it wasn't until we reached our destination that the butterfly orchids impressed, with many spikes in full bloom located. A few Bee Orchids, many Fragrant and Common Spotted Orchids, and lastly, a few yet to flower Broad-leaved Helleborines were also apparent. Round-headed Rampion (The Pride of Sussex) were in perfect condition, as were the Clustered Bellflowers.

All too soon it was time to make our way back to the van and to sadly head back to the hotel, where the tour ended. It had been a brilliant weekend exploring the many habitats that Hampshire has to offer, all in excellent company and with all going away with many exceptional wildlife highlights!

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## Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

I=Introduced		June 2023		
Common name	Scientific name	16	17	18
Canada Goose - I	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓		
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓		
Common Pheasant - I	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>		✓	✓
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Feral Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>			✓
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		✓	✓
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		✓	✓
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓		
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓		✓
Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaeetus melanocephalus</i>			✓
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓		✓
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>			✓
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		✓	
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>		✓	✓
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓	✓
European Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>		✓	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>			✓
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>			✓
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		✓	
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		✓	✓
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>		✓	✓
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓

I=Introduced		June 2023		
Common name	Scientific name	16	17	18
Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		✓	✓
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		✓	✓
Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓	✓
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		✓	
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		✓	
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		✓	✓
Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>		✓	
Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>		✓	✓
Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>		✓	
Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>		✓	
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	✓		
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓	
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓	✓
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		✓	
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		✓	
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		✓	
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓	
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>		✓	✓

## Butterflies

Common name	Scientific name
Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>
Dark Green Fritillary	<i>Speyeria aglaja</i>
Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>
Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>
Marbled White	<i>Melanargia galathea</i>
Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>
Small Blue	<i>Cupido minimus</i>
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>

Dingy Skipper	<i>Erynnis tages</i>
Large Skipper	<i>Ochlodes sylvanus</i>
Small Skipper	<i>Thymelicus sylvestris</i>

## Moths

Green Oak Tortrix  
 Scorched Wing  
 Brimstone  
 Peppered Moth  
 Privet Hawk Moth  
 Willow Beauty  
 Buff Ermine  
 Buff-tip  
 Marbled Minor  
 Light Emerald  
 Snout  
 Common Wainscot  
 Shoulder-striped Wainscot  
 Heart & Dart  
 Heart & Club  
 Large Yellow Underwing  
 Small Magpie  
 Flame  
 Flame Shoulder  
 Green Pug  
 Mocha  
 Blood Vein  
 Lobster Moth  
 Rustic Shoulder Knot  
 Burnished Brass

## Dragonflies

Emperor Dragonfly	<i>Anax imperator</i>
Broad-bodied Chaser	<i>Libellula depressa</i>
Common Blue Damselfly	<i>Enallagma cyathigerum</i>
Azure Damselfly	<i>Coenagrion puella</i>
Blue-tailed Damselfly	<i>Ischnura elegans</i>

## Flora

Common name	Scientific name
White Helleborine	<i>Cephalanthera damasonium</i>
Broad-leaved Helleborine	<i>Epipactis helleborine</i>
Bird's-nest Orchid	<i>Neottia nidus-avis</i>

Fly Orchid	<i>Ophrys insectifera</i>
Lizard Orchid	<i>Himantoglossum hircinum</i>
Common Twayblade	<i>Neottia ovata</i>
Greater Butterfly Orchid	<i>Platanthera chlorantha</i>
Musk Orchid	<i>Herminium monorchis</i>
Chalk Fragrant Orchid	<i>Gymnadenia conopsea</i>
Southern Marsh Orchid	<i>Dactylorhiza praetermissa</i>
Common Spotted Orchid	<i>Dactylorhiza fuchsii</i>
Early Purple Orchid	<i>Orchis mascula</i>
Pyramidal Orchid	<i>Anacamptis pyramidalis</i>
Common Bee Orchid	<i>Ophrys apifera</i>
Yellow Iris	<i>Iris pseudacorus</i>
Meadow Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus acris</i>
Common Kidney-vetch	<i>Anthyllis vulneraria</i>
Common Bird's-foot-trefoil	<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>
Common Milkwort	<i>Polygala vulgaris</i>
Blackthorn	<i>Prunus spinosa</i>
Hairy St John's-wort	<i>Hypericum hirsutum</i>
Common Cowslip	<i>Primula veris</i>
Common Viper's-bugloss	<i>Echium vulgare</i>
Field Cow-wheat	<i>Melampyrum arvense</i>
Marsh Thistle	<i>Cirsium palustre</i>
Common Mouse-ear Hawkweed	<i>Pilosella officinarum</i>
Field Scabious	<i>Knautia arvensis</i>