

Wildlife of the Hampshire Downs

Naturetrek Tour Report

29th – 31st May 2026



Linnets



Painted Lady



Bee Orchid



Sword-leaved Helleborine

Tour report by Jonathan Mycock



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Tour participants: Jonathan Mycock (leader) with six Naturetrek clients

Summary

This was a weekend tour, based in comfortable accommodation at the Angel Hotel, Privett, near Alton. The emphasis of the tour was on the diverse plant and insect life of the chalk downland of east Hampshire. The important downland reserves of Noar Hill and Old Winchester Hill were visited, along with beech and oak woodland. An additional highlight was an evening visit to an area of lowland heath, where we experienced the churring song of the crepuscular Nightjar, together with a Woodcock performing its circular 'roding' display flight.

A total of 162 plant species was recorded, including Bee and Fly Orchids, and the rare Narrow-leaved Helleborine. We found twelve species of butterfly, including Duke of Burgundy and Little Blue, together with a variety of day-flying moths and beetles. Of the forty-five species of birds recorded, the highlights were perhaps Marsh Tit and several Yellowhammers, as well as the above heathland species.

Day 1

Friday 29th May

Sunny, 28°C

Jonathan met the six clients in the bar area of the hotel and introduced the itinerary to the group. After a very enjoyable dinner, we retired for the evening, excited in anticipation of exploring the chalk downland the next day.

Day 2

Saturday 30th May

Sunny, 29°C

After a buffet breakfast, we headed north-east to the village of Selborne, made famous by the writings of Gilbert White in the late eighteenth century, in 'The Natural History of Selborne'. The morning was spent at the Hants and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust reserve at Noar Hill. Much of the site comprises a series of medieval chalk pits, which could not be ploughed during the Second World War, unlike much of the South Downs. The chalk workings possess a variety of aspects and soil depths, leading to the development of a highly diverse flora and associated lepidoptera.

Such was the abundance of plants that our progress through the reserve was extremely slow! Although the Common Spotted Orchids and Common Twayblades were already going over, there were many Pyramidal Orchids coming into flower, together with a few Chalk Fragrant Orchids, and one Bee Orchid. Thanks to a chance meeting with a local naturalist, we were able to locate two unobtrusive Fly Orchids. Kidney Vetch and Bird's-foot Trefoil attracted numerous Little and Common Blue butterflies respectively, while one chalk pit held two dainty Dukes of Burgundy.

Scattered Hawthorn and Juniper scrub held singing Common and Lesser Whitethroats, and a few Chiffchaffs. The surrounding arable farmland supported a Kestrel, and we saw some Linnets flying over. The shady, wooded edges of the reserve harboured several discrete colonies of White Helleborines, and we counted over thirty of these

attractive orchids. As we walked back along the track to the road, a noisy family of Marsh Tits was spotted, feeding busily in the Hazel bushes.

We returned to Selborne for lunch at White's Café and Tea Room, where we enjoyed home-made cake and scones. Later, we headed southwards to the Meon Valley, and an area of beech woodland on chalk. The shade cast by the towering beech trees was most welcome on what turned out to be quite a hot day! We moved slowly through the woodland reserve until we reached an area protected from trampling pressure by a woven hazel fence, where we found many Narrow-leaved Helleborines, growing in the dappled light. This species is scattered and rare in the UK, with its strongholds in Hampshire (this site being the main one). A few individuals were found close to the path, enabling the group to obtain close-up photographs. Satisfied with our observations and feeling a little weary, we made a detour to West Meon, where we purchased a refreshing ice cream from the village stores.

Finally, after another tasty dinner, we set out to visit an area of heathland close to the Hampshire/West Sussex border. We had only been present for ten minutes when the first Nightjar began its strange churring song, soon to be joined by one or two more. We were treated to some spectacularly close display flights, and even had a pair of them landing on the ground within two metres of us! Also exciting were repeated passes by a male Woodcock, carrying out its circular display flight while emitting alternate grunts and squeaks! A small bat was identified as a Soprano Pipistrelle by the bat detector. Since we had obtained good views of our target species, we decided to head back to the hotel, which we reached around 10.30pm. It had been a long but very rewarding day!

Day 3

Sunday 31st May

Cloudy with a light breeze, 20°C

After some of the guests had completed check out, we headed south again towards the Meon Valley, before climbing up to Old Winchester Hill NNR. En route, we had distant views across the South Downs, in both westerly and easterly directions. From the car park, we followed a level path which eventually led to a large Iron Age Hillfort, fringed with steep embankments. We found a few Common Spotted Orchids, and some emerging Chalk Fragrant Orchids. The sunny path held several basking Painted Lady butterflies and a lovely Hummingbird Hawk-moth, while we were serenaded by Skylarks over the adjacent arable fields. Hedgerow shrubs included Buckthorn and Wayfaring Tree, both chalk-loving species. The steep slopes of the hillfort were herb-rich, but appeared to have been heavily grazed by sheep and rabbits, so many of the plants exhibited low growth forms. Perhaps this, combined with the windier weather, led to a lack of butterflies, apart from a few Brimstones and Small Heaths, on the chalk grassland. Some of the numerous ant hills supported Wild Thyme in flower, together with Thyme-leaved Sandwort. Eventually, we headed back to the vehicle and drove to a tearoom at an old farm, where we had an enjoyable lunch of freshly made sandwiches.

Our hunger sated, we then headed north to Alice Holt Forest, near Farnham. Our destination was Abbots Wood Inclosure, and we spent our last hour here. In the car park, we had good views of a Beautiful Demoiselle, our first and only damselfly of the tour. The forest rides held several Speckled Wood butterflies, and we heard some noisy Great Spotted Woodpeckers and saw families of Blue and Great Tits, busily foraging for caterpillars. Soon it was time to return to the hotel and say our farewells. Everyone agreed that it had been an enjoyable and rewarding weekend in the lovely Hampshire downs!

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Species lists

Birds (H=heard only)

I=Introduced		May 2026		
Common name	Scientific name	29	30	31
Canada Goose - I	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		H	
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓	
Common Pheasant - I	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>		✓	
European Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>		✓	
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>		✓	✓
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		H	
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>			H
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		✓	
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		✓	
Eurasian Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>		✓	
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>			✓
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓	✓
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>		H	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>			H
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		✓	
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		H	
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>			✓
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		H	
Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>		✓	
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>			✓
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		✓	✓
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		✓	✓
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Curruca curruca</i>		H	
Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>		✓	✓
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		H	H
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		✓	
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		✓	H
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		H	✓
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		H	H
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		✓	✓
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓	✓
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>		✓	✓
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>			✓

Mammals

I=Introduced		May 2026		
Common name	Scientific name	29	30	31
European Rabbit - I	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		✓	
Eastern Grey Squirrel - I	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>		✓	
Soprano Pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus pygmaeus</i>		✓	
Western Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>		✓	

Butterflies

		May 2026		
Common name	Scientific name	29	30	31
Common Grizzled Skipper	<i>Pyrgus malvae</i>		✓	
Common Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>		✓	✓
Common Orange-tip	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>		✓	
Duke of Burgundy	<i>Hamearis lucina</i>		✓	
Holly Blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>		✓	✓
Little Blue	<i>Cupido minimus</i>		✓	
Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>		✓	
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>		✓	✓
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>		✓	✓
Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>		✓	✓
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>		✓	✓
Common Marbled White	<i>Melanargia galathea</i>			✓

Moths

L=larva		May 2026		
Common name	Scientific name	29	30	31
Common Nettle-tap	<i>Anthophila fabriciana</i>			✓
Five-spot Burnet	<i>Zygaena trifolii</i>			✓
Hummingbird Hawk-moth	<i>Macroglossum stellatarum</i>			✓
Scorched Carpet	<i>Ligdia adustata</i>		✓	
Speckled Yellow	<i>Pseudopanthera macularia</i>		✓	
Yellow-tail	<i>Euproctis similis</i>			L
Silver Y	<i>Autographa gamma</i>		✓	

Damselflies & dragonflies

		May 2026		
Common name	Scientific name	29	30	31
Beautiful Demoiselle	<i>Calopteryx virgo</i>			✓

Beetles

		May 2026		
Common name	Scientific name	29	30	31
Swollen-thighed Beetle	<i>Oedemera nobilis</i>			✓
Small Bloody-nosed Beetle	<i>Timarcha goettingensis</i>			✓
Seven-spot Ladybird	<i>Coccinella septempunctata</i>		✓	✓
Harlequin Ladybird	<i>Harmonia axyridis</i>			✓

Plants

Common name	Scientific name	May 2026		
		29	30	31
Great Horsetail	<i>Equisetum telmateia</i>			✓
Common Bracken	<i>Pteridium aquilinum</i>		✓	✓
Common Male Fern	<i>Dryopteris filix-mas</i>		✓	✓
Broad Buckler Fern	<i>Dryopteris dilatata</i>			✓
European Larch	<i>Larix decidua</i>		✓	✓
Scots Pine	<i>Pinus sylvestris</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Juniper	<i>Juniperus communis</i>		✓	✓
European Yew	<i>Taxus baccata</i>		✓	✓
Western Red-cedar	<i>Thuja plicata</i>		✓	✓
Common Lords-and-ladies	<i>Arum maculatum</i>		✓	
Black Bryony	<i>Dioscorea communis</i>		✓	
White Helleborine	<i>Cephalanthera damasonium</i>		✓	
Narrow-leaved Helleborine	<i>Cephalanthera longifolia</i>		✓	
Common Twayblade	<i>Neottia ovata</i>		✓	
Chalk Fragrant Orchid	<i>Gymnadenia conopsea</i>		✓	✓
Common Spotted Orchid	<i>Dactylorhiza fuchsii</i>		✓	✓
Pyramidal Orchid	<i>Anacamptis pyramidalis</i>		✓	✓
Common Bee Orchid	<i>Ophrys apifera</i>		✓	
Fly Orchid	<i>Ophrys insectifera</i>		✓	
Ramsons	<i>Allium ursinum</i>		✓	
Common Solomon's-seal	<i>Polygonatum multiflorum</i>		✓	
Soft Rush	<i>Juncus effusus</i>		✓	✓
Field Wood-rush	<i>Luzula campestris</i>			✓
Grey Sedge	<i>Carex divulsa</i>		✓	
Remote Sedge	<i>Carex remota</i>			✓
Pendulous Sedge	<i>Carex pendula</i>		✓	✓
Common Wood Sedge	<i>Carex sylvatica</i>		✓	✓
Wood Melick	<i>Melica uniflora</i>		✓	
Common False-brome	<i>Brachypodium sylvaticum</i>		✓	✓
False Oat-grass	<i>Arrhenatherum elatius</i>		✓	
Crested Hair-grass	<i>Koeleria macrantha</i>		✓	
Tufted Hair-grass	<i>Deschampsia caespitosa</i>			✓
Sweet Vernal-grass	<i>Anthoxanthum odoratum</i>		✓	
Common Quaking-grass	<i>Briza media</i>		✓	
Rough Meadow-grass	<i>Poa trivialis</i>		✓	
Yorkshire-fog	<i>Holcus lanatus</i>		✓	
Giant Fescue	<i>Festuca rubra</i>		✓	✓
Red Fescue	<i>Festuca gigantea</i>			✓
Perennial Rye-grass	<i>Lolium perenne</i>		✓	✓
Common Cock's-foot	<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>		✓	✓
Upright Brome	<i>Bromus erectus</i>		✓	
Soft Brome	<i>Bromus hordeaceus</i>		✓	
Purple Moor-grass	<i>Molinia caerulea</i>		✓	
Traveller's-joy	<i>Clematis vitalba</i>		✓	
Creeping Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus repens</i>		✓	
Meadow Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus acris</i>		✓	
Common Kidney-vetch	<i>Anthyllis vulneraria</i>		✓	
Common Bird's-foot-trefoil	<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>		✓	
Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil	<i>Lotus pedunculatus</i>			✓

Horseshoe Vetch	<i>Hippocrepis comosa</i>			✓
Hairy Tare	<i>Vicia hirsuta</i>			✓
Common Vetch	<i>Vicia sativa subsp. segetalis</i>			✓
Bush Vetch	<i>Vicia sepium</i>		✓	
Smooth Tare	<i>Vicia tetrasperma</i>			✓
Meadow Vetchling	<i>Lathyrus pratensis</i>		✓	
Black Medick	<i>Medicago lupulina</i>		✓	✓
White Clover	<i>Trifolium repens</i>		✓	
Hop Trefoil	<i>Trifolium campestre</i>		✓	
Red Clover	<i>Trifolium pratense</i>		✓	✓
Common Milkwort	<i>Polygala vulgaris</i>		✓	✓
Blackthorn	<i>Prunus spinosa</i>		✓	✓
European Wild Cherry	<i>Prunus avium</i>		✓	
Common Whitebeam	<i>Aria edulis</i>		✓	✓
Common Hawthorn	<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	✓	✓	✓
Bramble	<i>Rubus fruticosus agg.</i>	✓	✓	✓
Dewberry	<i>Rubus caesius</i>			✓
Silverweed	<i>Argentina anserina</i>		✓	✓
Common Tormantil	<i>Potentilla erecta</i>		✓	✓
Wild Strawberry	<i>Fragaria vesca</i>		✓	
Wood Avens	<i>Geum urbanum</i>		✓	✓
Salad Burnet	<i>Sanguisorba minor</i>		✓	✓
Dog Rose	<i>Rosa canina agg.</i>		✓	✓
European Buckthorn	<i>Rhamnus cathartica</i>			✓
Common Nettle	<i>Urtica dioica</i>	✓	✓	✓
European Beech	<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>		✓	✓
Pedunculate Oak	<i>Quercus robur</i>		✓	✓
Silver Birch	<i>Betula pendula</i>		✓	✓
European Hazel	<i>Corylus avellana</i>		✓	✓
White Bryony	<i>Bryonia cretica</i>		✓	✓
Hairy St John's-wort	<i>Hypericum hirsutum</i>		✓	
Perforate St John's-wort	<i>Hypericum perforatum</i>			✓
Common Dog Violet	<i>Viola riviniana</i>		✓	
Grey Willow	<i>Salix cinerea</i>		✓	✓
Dog's Mercury	<i>Mercurialis perennis</i>		✓	✓
Wood Spurge	<i>Euphorbia amygdaloides</i>		✓	✓
Fairy Flax	<i>Linum catharticum</i>		✓	✓
Hedgerow Crane's-bill	<i>Geranium pyrenaicum</i>			✓
Cut-leaved Crane's-bill	<i>Geranium dissectum</i>			✓
Common Herb Robert	<i>Geranium robertianum</i>		✓	✓
Rosebay Willowherb	<i>Epilobium angustifolium</i>		✓	✓
Common Enchanter's-nightshade	<i>Circaea lutetiana</i>		✓	✓
Norway Maple	<i>Acer platanoides</i>		✓	
Field Maple	<i>Acer campestre</i>		✓	✓
Common Sycamore	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>		✓	✓
Common Rock-rose	<i>Helianthemum nummularium</i>		✓	✓
Garlic Mustard	<i>Alliaria petiolata</i>		✓	✓
Sheep's Sorrel	<i>Rumex acetosella</i>		✓	✓
Broad-leaved Dock	<i>Rumex obtusifolius</i>		✓	✓
Thyme-leaved Sandwort	<i>Arenaria serpyllifolia</i>			✓
Red Campion	<i>Silene dioica</i>		✓	✓
Greater Stitchwort	<i>Stellaria holostea</i>			✓
Lesser Stitchwort	<i>Stellaria graminea</i>			✓

Common Dogwood	<i>Cornus sanguinea</i>		✓	✓
Common Cowslip	<i>Primula veris</i>		✓	✓
Scarlet Pimpernel	<i>Lysimachia arvensis</i>			✓
Wild Mignonette	<i>Reseda luteola</i>			✓
Rhododendron	<i>Rhododendron ponticum</i>		✓	
Cross-leaved Heath	<i>Erica tetralix</i>		✓	
Bell Heather	<i>Erica cinerea</i>		✓	
Common Heather	<i>Calluna vulgaris</i>		✓	
Lady's Bedstraw	<i>Galium verum</i>		✓	
Hedge Bedstraw	<i>Galium album</i>		✓	
Marsh Bedstraw	<i>Galium palustre</i>			✓
Common Cleavers	<i>Galium aparine</i>		✓	✓
Common Crosswort	<i>Cruciata laevipes</i>		✓	✓
Woodruff	<i>Galium odoratum</i>		✓	
Field Forget-me-not	<i>Myosotis arvensis</i>		✓	✓
Bittersweet	<i>Solanum dulcamara</i>		✓	
European Privet	<i>Ligustrum vulgare</i>		✓	
European Ash	<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>		✓	✓
Ribwort Plantain	<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>		✓	✓
Greater Plantain	<i>Plantago major</i>		✓	✓
Hoary Plantain	<i>Plantago media</i>		✓	
Wall Speedwell	<i>Veronica arvensis</i>		✓	
Germander Speedwell	<i>Veronica chamaedrys</i>		✓	
Common Foxglove	<i>Digitalis purpurea</i>		✓	✓
Common Figwort	<i>Scrophularia nodosa</i>		✓	✓
Common Ground-ivy	<i>Glechoma hederacea</i>		✓	✓
Wild Thyme	<i>Thymus praecox</i>		✓	✓
Common Marjoram	<i>Origanum vulgare</i>		✓	✓
Wood Sage	<i>Teucrium scorodonia</i>		✓	
Hedge Woundwort	<i>Stachys sylvatica</i>		✓	✓
White Dead-nettle	<i>Lamium album</i>		✓	✓
Knapweed Broomrape	<i>Orobanche elatior</i>		✓	
Red Bartsia	<i>Odontites vernus</i>		✓	
Lesser Yellow Rattle	<i>Rhinanthus minor</i>		✓	✓
European Holly	<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>		✓	✓
Common Knapweed	<i>Centaurea nigra</i>		✓	✓
Greater Knapweed	<i>Centaurea scabiosa</i>		✓	
Marsh Thistle	<i>Cirsium palustre</i>			✓
Creeping Thistle	<i>Cirsium arvense</i>			✓
Common Goat's-beard	<i>Tragopogon pratensis</i>		✓	✓
Prickly Sow-thistle	<i>Sonchus asper</i>			✓
Dandelion	<i>Taraxacum agg.</i>		✓	✓
Nipplewort	<i>Lapsana communis</i>		✓	
Hoary Ragwort	<i>Jacobaea erucifolia</i>		✓	✓
Common Fleabane	<i>Pulicaria dysenterica</i>			✓
Common Daisy	<i>Bellis perennis</i>		✓	
European Yarrow	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>		✓	
Oxeye Daisy	<i>Leucanthemum vulgare</i>		✓	✓
European Elder	<i>Sambucus nigra</i>		✓	✓
Wayfaring-tree	<i>Viburnum lantana</i>		✓	
Guelder-rose	<i>Viburnum opulus</i>		✓	✓
Common Honeysuckle	<i>Lonicera periclymenum</i>		✓	✓
Field Scabious	<i>Knautia arvensis</i>		✓	✓

Small Scabious	<i>Scabiosa columbaria</i>		✓	
Common Ivy	<i>Hedera helix</i>	✓	✓	✓
European Sanicle	<i>Sanicula europaea</i>		✓	
Cow Parsley	<i>Anthriscus sylvestris</i>		✓	✓
Upright Hedge-parsley	<i>Torilis japonica</i>			✓
Ground-elder	<i>Aegopodium podagraria</i>			✓
Common Hogweed	<i>Heracleum sphondylium</i>		✓	✓