

The New Forest

Naturetrek Tour Report

23rd – 25th May 2023



Common Lizard



Orange-tip



Four-spotted Chaser



New Forest Ponies and Fallow Deer

Tour report and images by Jonathan Mycock



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Tour participants: Jonathan Mycock (Leader) with seven Naturetrek clients

Summary

This was a short, mid-week, general natural history tour, based in comfortable accommodation at the New Forest Lodge, Lyndhurst. An early highlight was an evening visit to a heath, where we experienced the churring song of the crepuscular Nightjar, along with other sounds as dusk fell – Snipe, Teal, Tawny Owl, Cuckoo and Frogs. The magnificent ancient woodland held breeding Wood Warbler, Redstart, Spotted Flycatcher, Firecrest and Nuthatch. Heathland, valley mire and bog pools produced Curlew, Stonechat, Meadow Pipit, Linnet and Reed Bunting. Edge habitats e.g., groves of Holly held the elusive Hawfinch and a chance encounter with a stunning male Whinchat. Larger bodies of freshwater held Mute Swan, Canada Goose, Little Egret, Oystercatcher and Reed Warbler.

Apart from the 67 species of birds which were seen or heard, we also saw Fallow Deer, Common Lizard, Pool Frog, Butterflies and Dragonflies, together with a wide range of plants (including the carnivorous Sundews) occurring in the many different habitats that we explored.

Day 1

Tuesday 23rd May

Weather: Clear, blue sky, still. Up to 21°C.

Jonathan met the group in the bar area of the hotel and introduced the itinerary. After a very enjoyable dinner we headed south to explore an area of heathland near Beaulieu Road Station. As we walked across the heath several bird species were singing from the trees and bushes lining the railway line, including Chiffchaff, Blackcap and Garden Warbler. Near the valley mire of Shatterford Bottom we encountered a noisy family of Stonechats, and from across the heath we began to hear the strange churring song of the Nightjar. We walked on to the ancient boundary bank of Bishop's Dyke, where we waited in the hope of seeing Nightjars displaying. As darkness fell, we heard the calls of Eurasian Teal and Common Snipe coming from the pools beyond, while a Tawny Owl was hooting from the more distant woodland. We heard three or four Nightjars churring and emitting their "kewip" flight calls, but sadly we did not observe any birds in flight. We returned to the hotel, happy to have enjoyed such an atmospheric experience.

Day 2

Wednesday 24th May

Weather: Clear, blue sky, sunny. Up to 21 °C. Light wind.

After a hearty breakfast we headed to Bolderwood, north of Lyndhurst, where we explored the holly groves in search of Hawfinch. Here there were many singing birds and Jonathan tried to teach the group some of their songs, aiming for 'five a day'. These included Song Thrush, with its repetitive piping notes, Chaffinch and Willow Warbler. In the trees lining the road, we heard a brief song of a Wood Warbler, a species sadly experiencing a steep decline in Hampshire. Our next destination was Acres Down to the east, where we walked along the track through the mixed woodland, with an understory of Holly. Here we saw a Nuthatch feeding in a mature Oak tree and Great Spotted Woodpecker was calling nearby. We climbed up the steep path onto the Acres Down ridge, where a wide panorama lay ahead. Unfortunately, there was a low hazy cloud cover, which made scanning for Honey Buzzard

quite challenging, and we failed to locate any. However, we had very close views of a displaying pair of Common Buzzards. Lunch was taken at The Trusty Servant pub in Minstead.

After lunch we headed northwards to Holly Hatch Inclosure, where we walked along the edge of the plantation, bordering the open heath. A large herd of Fallow Deer were grazing amongst a few New Forest Ponies, whilst further on we discovered a nesting pair of noisy Common Redstarts by a dead tree. Linnets and Meadow Pipits were perched in the Heather and Gorse, whilst a Kestrel hovered overhead. Jonathan spotted a probable, distant Honey Buzzard in the heat haze, but at such a range could not be 100% sure! The group returned to Bolderwood to catch the ice-cream van, and enjoyed our ices sitting under the ornamental conifers where Goldcrests and Siskins were calling, and tame Chaffinches swooped down to share our cornets.

Day 3

Thursday 25th May

Weather: Clear and sunny with a few clouds. 10-22 °C

Before breakfast, two keen members of the group left the hotel at 06.30 with Jonathan and headed up to Bolderwood for an early birdwatch. Shortly after we got out of the minibus a female Common Crossbill flew overhead, giving its loud “jip-jip” call. Crossing the road, we headed down the path into Highland Water Inclosure and Jonathan very quickly picked up the song of Wood Warbler. We crept along the track until the Warbler could be seen flitting through the beech trees and giving its beautiful song. We then re-traced our steps and examined the hollies lining the large area of ‘Lawn’ for Hawfinch, as they are known to frequent this habitat. Before long, one Hawfinch flew across the road, then two more were seen flying low in the opposite direction, their broad white wing-bars and stocky, short-tailed appearance being very distinctive. At the base of the Holly, a chat proved to be a male Whinchat, an uncommon passage migrant in the New Forest. The group then returned to the hotel for a well-earned breakfast.

Later we headed back down to Beaulieu Road Station, parking near the stockyard where the autumn sales of New Forest Ponies are held. Song Thrushes, Blackcaps, Siskins and Chaffinches sang from the bushes lining the railway line. Curlew, Cuckoo, families of Stonechat were also seen. The Valley Mire at Shatterford Bottom held numerous Four-spotted Chaser dragonflies, quartering the water surface and alighting on the tips of rushes. A Common Lizard was found on the edge of the path, its bright colouration possibly indicating that it had recently sloughed its old skin. Bog pools near Bishops Dyke held singing Reed Bunting and a Snipe giving its strange tick-tocking call. Other pools held Canada Geese, Mallard with young, Teal and a calling Green Woodpecker in the fringing dead trees.

We then climbed up through the Ancient Woodland of Denny Wood, dominated, by mighty Oaks and Beech. Here, large clearings had been created where a tree had fallen and died, providing an abundance of dead wood for Woodpeckers, Fungi and Beetles (e.g., Stag Beetle). A calling Spotted Flycatcher was found in one such glade, and in the Holly understorey we could hear the high pitched calls of Firecrests. Returning to the vehicle, we drove to the village of Beaulieu, where we had a very enjoyable lunch in the Old Bakery tea rooms.

Afterwards we examined Beaulieu Mill Pond for birds, producing nesting Mute Swans and Coot. Little Egret, Oystercatcher, Lesser Black-backed and Black-headed Gulls were feeding on the shore and Reed Warblers were singing in the fringing vegetation. Swifts and House Martins were seen wheeling around over the village.

Our final port of call was Hatchet Pond, where there were few birds, but the smaller ponds close by produced several species of Odonata, including Common Blue and Large Red Damselfly.

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

I = Introduced		May 2023		
Common name	Scientific name	23	24	25
Canada Goose - I	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	H		✓
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>			4
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>			✓
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	H		✓
Common Pheasant - I	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>			✓
European Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>	H		H
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>			2
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	H	2+	✓
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>			✓
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			✓
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>			1
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>			4
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	H		H
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	H		✓
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>			✓
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>			✓
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓	✓
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	H		
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		H	✓
European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</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>	✓	✓	✓
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>			✓
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓
Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</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>		✓	
Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>		H	1
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		H	✓
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	H	✓	✓
Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>			H
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	H	✓	✓
Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>	H		

I = Introduced		May 2023		
Common name	Scientific name	23	24	25
Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>			✓
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>			✓
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		✓	
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		✓	✓
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		✓	✓
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		✓	✓
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>			1
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>		2	✓
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓
Duncock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓	✓
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>			✓
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	✓
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓
Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>			3
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>			✓
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		3	
Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>			1F
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		✓	✓
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>			✓

Others

		May 2023		
Common name	Scientific name	23	24	25
Mammals				
Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓		✓
Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>		✓	
Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>		✓	
Herptiles				
Common Lizard	<i>Zootoca vivipara</i>			1
Butterflies				
Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>			✓
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>			✓
Holly Blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>			✓
Peacock	<i>Inachis io</i>			✓
Orange Tip	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>			✓
Dragonflies				
Four-spotted Chaser	<i>Libellula quadrimaculata</i>		✓	✓

Common name	Scientific name	May 2023		
		23	24	25
Large Red Damselfly	<i>Phyrrhosoma nymphula</i>			✓
Common Blue Damselfly	<i>Enallagma cyathigerum</i>			✓