

The New Forest

Naturetrek Tour Report

23rd – 25th May 2025



Firecrest



Denny Wood



Hampshire Water-purslane



Goshawk

Tour report by Simon Woolley
Photos by Simon Woolley, Vicci Johnson and Simon Pettman



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour participants: Simon Woolley (leader) with seven Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Friday 23rd May

The group met up at the Lyndhurst Forest Lodge Hotel at 6.30pm, made introductions, and had a brief introduction to the history and habitats of the New Forest from Simon, before enjoying an evening meal together. The wildlife action started early in the tour, with a post-dinner excursion to Broomy Plain in the far west of the Forest. En route, we saw a couple of Fallow Deer, and (less to be expected) a small herd of Red Deer. We arrived at Broomy, and a Nightjar sang briefly almost immediately. Hopes rose! As sunset approached, a displaying Woodcock flew by, and a couple of Tawny Owls called. Just as the light was failing, a pair of Nightjars flew about over the bracken, giving us really good views, and later, we were able to watch these cryptic birds spotlighted in Simon's torch beam as they flew over our heads. Bat detection (and our eyes) revealed Common Pipistrelle, Noctule and Serotine Bats as well. We had made a flying start to the tour indeed!

Day 2

Saturday 24th May

After a 7.45am breakfast, of the slap-up variety, we left at 8.30am and headed the short distance north-west to Acres Down. We started down low in the woods since it was cool and a little windy, after overnight rain. Things were, as a consequence, rather quiet, but we soon started connecting with common woodland birds, and brushing up on our bird songs. Blackbird: fruity and refreshing; Song Thrush: the melodic but repetitive party guest; Mistle Thrush: an echoing Turner watercolour painting. A pair of Spotted Flycatchers made for a refreshing early highlight, and we heard Cuckoos in the distance, as well as a briefly drumming Great Spotted Woodpecker. We heard (some of us!) several Firecrests, but had only super brief views of one. They are often less showy this late in the breeding season.

We did a loop walk via a large clear-felled area, and "chup-chup" calls overhead heralded Crossbills! Three of them, one a smart brick-red male, pitched in a trackside Scots Pine and started feeding on pine cones, allowing us excellent views. Very pleased, we moved on to a larger open area, enjoying Oblong-leaved Sundews before having a look for birds. Simon's (frankly) superhuman vision somehow picked out a bird-shaped blob on top of a spindly dead tree, and examination in the scope revealed it to be a Snipe, which remained there throughout our ten minutes on site. It didn't even budge when a powerful raptor hove into view: it was a very obvious, hefty Goshawk! We were elated to get prolonged views of this, the ultimate predatory denizen of the New Forest.

Well pleased with our haul so far, we climbed up the hill from the car park to the ridge, first through holly-dominated woods, and then onto open heath (with Stonechats in residence), with magnificent views over a huge expanse of woodland. We spent a happy forty-five minutes or so waiting and scanning...and scanning. While none of the hoped-for Honey Buzzards showed, we saw lots of Common Buzzards, plus Swifts and Swallows, another Goshawk (carrying prey to its nest), Ravens and an excellent Peregrine Falcon.

After a tasty lunch in the snug at the Green Dragon at Brook, we drove to the northern edge of the Forest, at Telegraph Hill/Island Thorns. We first explored the heath, in less than ideal, rather windy

conditions, but did find Tree Pipit, at least one showy Cuckoo, more Stonechats and a brief flyover Hawfinch or two, plus a Latticed Heath moth. The broken woodland edge gave us (finally) views of a smart singing Redstart and another Spotted Flycatcher, plus Hawfinches calling unseen in the canopy. The lovely Island Thorns Inclosure proper had an active Wren nest, a cute-as-can-be family of Blue Tits, and lots more bird song to revise.

A final session on the heath saw us combing the gorse patches thoroughly, seeing Meadow Pipits, another Cuckoo, Stonechats and Linnets, and finally not one but three Dartford Warblers. We had had a busy, bird-filled day, and returned to Lyndhurst very happy with our haul.

Day 3

Sunday 25th May

With more overnight rain, we skipped what would likely have been an underwhelming early session, had breakfast at 7.45am, drove the short distance to Lyndhurst to buy picnic supplies, and headed to Denny Wood for around 9.00am. We started with a frustratingly furtive Treecreeper and a heard-only Nuthatch, but soon plunged into the fairytale ancient woodlands and lost ourselves among the wonderful old trees, standing dead wood and fallen timber. We listened to many Redstarts, and saw several, found an active Great Spotted Woodpecker nest, and struck gold with a pair of Marsh Tits busily feeding their young at close range. It was a really lovely walk through a beautiful part of the Forest.

We emerged onto the heathland and walked as far as the valley mire of Shatterford, taking in the flora and scanning the woodlands and heathy horizons. Alas, Honey Buzzards continued to elude us, but we saw many Common Buzzards, a displaying Curlew, a Lapwing emerging from and vanishing back into the bog, and a singing Reed Bunting.

Having walked back to the van, we drove the short distance to Pig Bush, and walked just a couple of hundred metres to a lovely picnic spot on the edge of the wood, which gave great views across the heath back towards Denny. Yet more assiduous scanning between and after sandwiches still produced no Honey Buzzard: it was just not meant to be this time. However, we did pick up a superb male Redstart, Linnets, and two magnificent Hobbies hawking about over the mire. One came very close and flew right over us, much to the delight of one client in particular, for whom the bird was a 'lifer'!

We moved on again to Hatchet Pond, on the edge of Beaulieu Heath. While the birds were a little prosaic (Mallard, Coot, Moorhen and Black-headed Gull), we saw some smart plants such as Marsh St John's Wort, Marsh Speedwell, Round-leaved Sundew and Bogbean, plus the exceedingly rare Hampshire-purslane, found in Britain in only a handful ponds in Hampshire and Dorset: Hatchet Pond holds by far the largest colony.

We were all getting fairly tired, so we negotiated the bustling village of Brockenhurst (just about) and drove north-west to the Rhinefield area, and the Ornamental Drive. We stopped at the arboretum car park, which was rather busy, but did have loos, and a coffee/ice-cream van, both of which were very welcome. Refreshed, we set off for our final quest: to see Firecrests properly! We started decently, with a showy and responsive Goldcrest right above our heads, but it was the rarer *Regulus* that we wanted. Careful checking of calls and song (the Merlin app helped us, given our collectively high-pitch-disabled

ears!) led us to the right spot, and very soon we had a superb male Firecrest singing and displaying just feet above us, his glorious orange crown raised. Mission accomplished!

We enjoyed a final hour's walk around the woods, admiring the huge non-native conifer trees at this site, and under no real pressure: we had simply seen almost all the New Forests special birds, the majority of them well. Those pesky Honey Buzzards will need a return visit, perhaps! We drove back to the hotel, and the party went their separate ways.

This had been a thoroughly enjoyable, relaxed and yet bird-filled weekend. Everyone had been great company, and we all went home having seen so much of the varied habitats and wildlife that the wonderful New Forest has to offer.

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

Common name	Scientific name	May 2025		
		23	24	25
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>			✓
European Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>	3		
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>		2	✓
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>		4	
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		✓	✓
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>			H
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>			1
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			2
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>			1
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>			1
Eurasian Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>	1		
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		1	
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>			✓
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>		1	
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>			1
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		1	
Eurasian Goshawk	<i>Astur gentilis</i>		22	
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		12	✓
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	H		
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		H	1
European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>			1
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>			2
Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>			2
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>			2
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>		✓	✓
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		✓	✓
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		7	
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		2	1
Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>			4
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>			1
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		4	✓
Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		2	5
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		3H	2H
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		10	3
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		1H	3H
Dartford Warbler	<i>Curruca undata</i>		3	
Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>		2+H	1
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		H	1
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>			✓
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		✓	✓

Common name	Scientific name	May 2025		
		23	24	25
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		10	2
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>		3	
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓	✓
Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>		6	4
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓	✓
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓
Dunnoek	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		2	
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>			2
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	✓
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>		2	
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓
Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>		3	
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		1	
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		6	2
Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>		3	
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		10	6
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		2	3
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>			1

Mammals

Common name	Scientific name	May 2025		
		23	24	25
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>			2
Brown Rat	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>	1		
Eurasian Serotine	<i>Cnephaeus serotinus</i>	✓		
Common Noctule	<i>Nyctalus noctula</i>	✓		
Common Pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i>	✓		
Western Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	5		
Common Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>	3		

Invertebrates

		May 2025		
Common name	Scientific name	23	24	25
Butterflies				
Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>			2
Moths				
Latticed Heath	<i>Chiasmia clathrata</i>		2	
Dragonflies				
Broad-bodied Chaser	<i>Libellula depressa</i>			5