

The New Forest

Naturetrek Tour Report

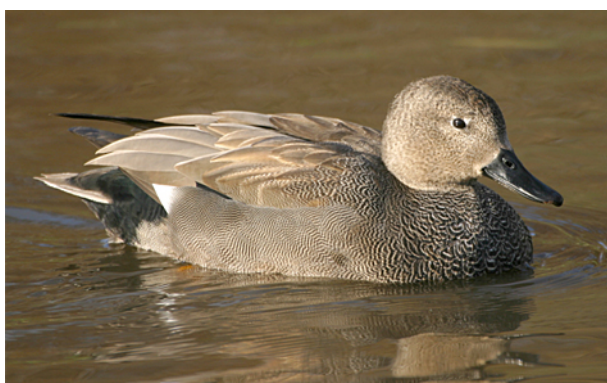
22nd – 24th May 2026



Stonechat



Avocet



Gadwall



New Forest ponies

Tour report by Jonathan Mycock



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

Summary

This was a weekend tour, based in comfortable accommodation at the Beaulieu Hotel, Beaulieu Road. 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, Cuckoo and Marsh Frogs. The magnificent ancient woodlands held breeding Redstart, Marsh Tit, Treecreeper and Nuthatch, while heathland, valley mire and bog pools produced Curlew, Dartford Warbler, Stonechat, Tree Pipit, Linnet and Reed Bunting. Edge habitats such as groves of Holly held the elusive Hawfinch and several calling Cuckoos. The coastal wetlands, saltmarsh and mudflats attracted Avocet, Lapwing, Ringed Plover, Gadwall, Wigeon and Reed Warbler, among others.

Apart from the 85 species of birds seen or heard, we also saw Soprano Pipistrelle bats, several butterflies (including the rare Pearl-bordered Fritillary), and a wide range of plants in the many different habitats that we explored.

Day 1

Friday 22nd May

Jonathan met the clients in the bar of the hotel and introduced the itinerary. After a very enjoyable dinner, we headed out on foot to explore an area of heathland and valley mire known as Shatterford Bottom, and Bishops Dyke. As we walked across the heath, several bird species were singing from the trees and bushes lining the railway line, including Blackbird, Robin and Chiffchaff. Near the valley mire, 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 towards the ancient boundary bank of Bishop's Dyke, in the hope of seeing Nightjars displaying.

As darkness fell, we heard the strange sound of Snipes performing their aerial display flight, known as "drumming", above the bog pools. We heard three or four Nightjars churring and emitting their "kewip" flight calls, and suddenly one flew close by, taking us somewhat by surprise! The evening was clear and bright, and we were able to see four of the moons of Jupiter through Jonathan's telescope. On our return journey to the hotel, Doug picked up several bats hunting over the heath with his bat detector, and identified them Soprano Pipistrelles. We returned to the hotel, happy to have enjoyed such an atmospheric experience.

Day 2

Saturday 23rd May

After an excellent breakfast in the Drift Restaurant, we headed to Bolderwood, north of Lyndhurst. En route, a lovely herd of ponies was grazing on the lawn by the roadside, with their young foals looking particularly cute. Jonathan led the group into Highland Water Inclosure, in search of Wood Warbler, but while he had located it two years earlier, it was no longer present. Next, we explored the holly groves in search of Hawfinch, and we were fortunate in spotting a pair flying low under the canopy. Jonathan found them feeding quietly on the ground, and several members of the group managed to see this large, elusive finch. A quick visit to the deer-viewing platform provided brief views of a Treecreeper at the edge of the grassland, while Goldcrests and Coal Tits were heard calling from the tall, exotic conifers.

Our next destination was Acres Down, where we walked along a track through mixed woodland, with an understorey of Holly. We climbed up the steep path onto Acres Down ridge, where a wide panorama lay ahead.

Despite the warm, calm weather, the heat haze made viewing distant raptors quite challenging. Although a few buzzards were circling in the distance, they were too far away to determine whether any were the much scarcer Honey Buzzard. However, we had distant views of a female Goshawk, while on the heath there were several singing Tree Pipits, and noisy families of Stonechats in the gorse bushes.

We returned to the Drift Restaurant for lunch, having negotiated some very heavy bank holiday traffic through Lyndhurst. After lunch we headed out to Denny Wood on foot from the hotel. The mature Scots Pine trees surrounding the car park provided us with decent views of a pair of Crossbills, and a displaying Siskin. Soon afterwards, a pair of Hobbies was seen circling high over the trees.

The ancient woodland provided some welcome shade, and we soon focused on trying to hear woodland birds calling and singing. These included a distant Nuthatch, while close to the path we found a pair of obliging Marsh Tits. Further into the wood, we detected a Redstart by its distinctive song, and eventually located a female carrying food (a proof of breeding) and a fine singing male, both at the edge of a glade created by a fallen tree. One noticeable feature of the woodland was the relatively large amount of standing and lying dead wood, compared with the woods that most people were familiar with.

Once we had exited the wood, we came to a stream and a large boggy area (though it was now quite dry after months with little rain). Here we obtained good views of a male Broad-bodied Chaser dragonfly, showing off its powder-blue abdomen from a perch close by. Further on, a dead Scots Pine near to the railway line held a calling Cuckoo, which gave good views in the scope.

After dinner, Andy and Will returned to the previous night's location to try for Nightjar again, and were successful in seeing one and hearing three or four churring birds, together with croaking Marsh Frogs! The rest of the group joined Jonathan to complete the checklist before retiring to bed.

Day 3

Sunday 24th May

Before breakfast, three members the group left the hotel at 6.30am with Jonathan and headed out onto Beaulieu Heath. We encountered several family groups of Stonechats and had close views of Meadow Pipit and Skylark. Jonathan briefly heard a Dartford Warbler singing, but it proved elusive. A pair of Ravens frequented the tall pines close to the rail line, while many of the gorse bushes held singing Common Whitethroats. The group members then returned to the hotel for a well-earned breakfast.

After checking out of the hotel, we headed down to Lymington, where we called in at a supermarket to buy food for our picnic lunch. As we waited for the store to open, we watched some Swifts speeding overhead. Eventually, we arrived at Keyhaven on the coast, and inspected an inland pool for waders and wildfowl. Birds included a pair of Gadwall, a Ringed Plover and a singing Reed Bunting. We then headed along the King Charles III coastal path. A patch of reed was home to our first singing Reed Warbler, whilst the gorse bushes held many Linnets.

The coastal spits, saltmarsh and mudflats produced Cormorants, a flock of over fifty Sandwich Terns, and Great Black-backed Gull. On the inland side of the path, the series of brackish and freshwater pools provided us with a female Wigeon, a group of Egyptian Geese, breeding Avocets and a lovely pair of Little Terns, which were fishing at the far end of one pool. Eventually, we sat on the embankment and ate our sandwiches, sometimes having to

fend off over-friendly dogs wanting to sample our food! A few Sand Martins were hawking for insects over the pools in front of us.

Having finished our lunch, we returned to the car park at Keyhaven and then drove to Brockenhurst, before taking a narrow side road and a track to a Forestry Commission plantation. Here, we went on a circular walk to search for butterflies, enjoying some welcome, intermittent shade, since the temperature was much higher away from the coast. We hadn't gone far before we saw our first Pearl-bordered Fritillary, a beautiful orange-and-brown butterfly, and one for which this wood is a known site. Eventually, we recorded over ten of these uncommon insects. We also had good views of a trio of Marsh Tits, but a singing male Redstart proved more elusive. We departed the woodland at 3.30 pm, returning to our hotel a little after 4.00pm for some of the clients to catch their trains home. Everyone agreed that it had been a wonderful weekend, with comfortable accommodation, great company and some memorable wildlife encounters!

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Species lists

Birds (H=heard only)

I=introduced		May 2026		
Common name	Scientific name	22	23	24
Canada Goose - I	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	H	✓	✓
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>			✓
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>			✓
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>			✓
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>			✓
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	H		
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>			2
Common Pheasant - I	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	H	H	✓
European Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>	1	1	
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>			✓
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	H	✓	✓
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>			✓
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>			✓
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>			✓
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		✓	✓
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	H	1	
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>			✓
Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>			✓
Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>			✓
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>			✓
Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyaeetus melanocephalus</i>			✓
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>			✓
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>			✓
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			✓
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>			✓
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>			✓
Eurasian Goshawk	<i>Astur gentilis</i>		✓	
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓	✓
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		✓	H
European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		H	
Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>		2	
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>			✓
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓

I=Introduced		May 2026		
Common name	Scientific name	22	23	24
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>			✓
Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>		✓	✓
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>			✓
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>			✓
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		✓	
Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓	✓
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>			H
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		✓	
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		✓	✓
Common Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>			✓
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		✓	
Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>			✓
Dartford Warbler	<i>Curruca undata</i>			H
Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>		H	H
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		H	✓
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		H	
Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</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>	✓	✓	✓
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>		✓	✓
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓	✓
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓	✓
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	✓
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>		✓	
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓
Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>		2	
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		1	
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓	✓	✓
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>			✓
Common Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>		✓	
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		✓	✓
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>		✓	
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>			✓

Mammals

Common name	Scientific name	May 2026		
		22	23	24
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Soprano Pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus pygmaeus</i>	✓	✓	

Butterflies

Common name	Scientific name	May 2026		
		22	23	24
Common Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>		✓	✓
Green-veined White	<i>Pieris napi</i>		✓	
Small Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>		✓	
Holly Blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Pearl-bordered Fritillary	<i>Boloria euphrosyne</i>			✓
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>		✓	✓
Peacock Butterfly	<i>Aglais io</i>		✓	✓
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>		✓	

Damselflies & dragonflies

Common name	Scientific name	May 2026		
		22	23	24
a bluet	<i>Coenagrion sp.</i>		✓	
Broad-bodied Chaser	<i>Libellula depressa</i>		✓	