

Winter in the New Forest

Naturetrek Tour Report

24 - 26 February 2012



Scarlet Elf Cap



Red-breasted & Brent Goose



Marsh Tit



Nuthatch

Report and Images compiled by Jon Stokes



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Day 1

Friday 24th February

The group gathered in the hotel before dinner and we planned the weekend. The weather looked good, there were birds around, all we had to do was find them! After dinner we talked further about the New Forest and its history and ecology, before turning in for the night.

Day 2

Saturday 25th February

The day dawned grey and overcast but as we set off into the Forest there was plenty of bird song. As we drove towards our first stop, a Goshawk suddenly swept majestically along the road towards the van! Those on the left side of the van then had fleeting but fantastic views of this magnificent bird of prey, before it disappeared out of sight. A great start and to make things even better, as we crossed the Forest, blue sky began to appear...

Our first stop was alongside the River Avon to look for the wintering group of Bewick's Swans. Lapwing called, Skylarks sang but the Bewicks remained absent, so after a while we moved onto the gravel pits.

As we arrived, the bird feeders had Redpoll and Siskins feeding and the tops of the trees trilled with hundreds of Redwings and Fieldfares. Walking towards the first hide, the logs piles were covered in the truly stunning Scarlet Elf Cap fungi and the first Wild Daffodils were flowering. As the Bitterns were showing from one of the hides we went to look and as we arrived one showed well for a few minutes then did their famous disappearing act into the reeds and didn't reappear. However Cetti's Warblers called from the reeds, a few Water Rails wandered around and on the lake there were many waterfowl including Gadwall, Shoveler, Pochard and Tufted Duck.

Walking back to the van, one of the group members saw a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and all of us heard it drumming in the trees, counterpointed soon after by the much deeper drumming of a Great Spotted Woodpecker. Now the sun was fully out, and the warm weather began to draw out Red Admirals. Amazingly during the morning we managed to see 6, which for a Saturday in February is quite astounding!

As the sun was fully out, we decided to look for Goshawks and set off for Acres Down. By the time we arrived the thermals had started and as we walked around the heath, we spotted our first Buzzard on the rising air. After only a few minutes we then found our first Goshawk, then more Buzzards and another Goshawk, high in the sky. February is the best time to see Goshawks in the Forest and as we left for lunch we spotted another pair, cruising along the ridge but they were a long way off.

After lunch in a nearby pub, we set off on a Hawfinch quest. With a national population estimated to number only about 400 birds, the New Forest holds perhaps 10% of all the UK's Hawfinches, so it was fantastic that as we arrived at the arboretum we didn't have to wait long before they began to appear, first one flying over, then another landed conveniently in the top of a tall tree giving all present first class views. With a supporting cast of Bullfinch and Goldcrest we could have stayed longer but we wanted to make a few more stops before dark.

Our next stop has for the last few months been the home of a wanderer from the United States of America. This beautiful small finch - a Dark Eyed Junco, turned up on New Years Eve and has been watched by birders from all over Britain ever since. Often elusive and hard to find, it could not have been more co-operative for us, appearing after only a few seconds and sitting on top of a fallen tree in full view of all. A cracking bird and unexpected species for February in Hampshire!

Our last stop of the afternoon was at Beaulieu Heath where as the sun began to set, we headed out to hunt for a Great Grey Shrike. Luckily he had not gone to roost and was perched in full view allowing good scope views. 5 minutes later and he had gone, heading off to roost, so we took our queue and headed back to the hotel for dinner. However we had one last treat as we went - the beautiful view of the crescent Moon, Jupiter and Venus in a clear sky – it was a fitting close to a great days birding in the Forest.

Day 3

Sunday 26th February

Today dawned bright and clear and we set off into the Forest after breakfast. Our first visit was a local spot where the woodland birds come to be fed, and in the beautiful sunlight we watched a parade of Blue and Great Tits, Nuthatches and Dunnock, Coal and Marsh Tits and many more, come for the food. Overhead Stock Doves flew about and the warmth of the morning made it a very pleasant experience.

Then we set off for the coast, stopping after only a few miles as last night Great Grey Shrike was sitting on top of a nearby bush. We turned around and had excellent views of this beautiful winter visitor, until a policeman moved us on! The coast of the New Forest is very beautiful, and arriving, the air was filled with the calls of Wigeon and Brent Geese as we made our way to the sea wall taking in the vast array of birds around us. Snipe, Bar and Black Tailed Godwits, Redshank and Greenshank were wading in the wet meadows, whilst offshore Goldeneye and Red-breasted Mergansers swam. Overhead large flocks of Brent Geese swirled and in the distance we had a beautiful view of The Needles on the Isle of Wight.

As we walked along the wall, the sheer numbers of birds was almost overwhelming some of the highlights including Water and Rock Pipits, Ruff, Greenshank, Mediterranean Gulls, Little Egrets and Avocets. At the end of the point, a superb male Dartford Warbler was singing from the top of a gorse bush and gave some great views to the delight of the group.

Yesterday a Red-breasted Goose turned up on the marshes and luckily it was still there today. However it did take a while for us to locate it, but with the keen eyes of the group, we did locate this fantastic vagrant from the Siberian arctic. In the early afternoon sunshine this small relative of the Brent Geese was initially difficult to spot until it turned into the sun, then its vibrant red plumage glowed, making it a great find.

Next we collected some sandwiches from a local supermarket and headed for a picnic in the Forest. As we ate our lunch, we could hear Crossbills and a quick look into the top of the neighbouring Scots Pines revealed some cracking red males feeding on pine cones. Over the heath two Ravens flew and a Merlin whizzed high above our heads towards the sea.

Then we headed off for our last visit of the trip. Another extreme rarity has been on the edge of the Forest - a Spanish Sparrow, and we decided to see if we could find it. Unfortunately when we arrived, two 'bird' photographers with the largest lenses money can buy were sitting 2 feet from the hedge where the bird was hiding, so that even if the poor thing did appear they could only have managed to photograph its eyeball! Why you buy the biggest lens you can and then try to get so close to the bird that it hides in 'lens terror' was beyond us, so we didn't stop, preferring instead to go to check out Calshot spit. Here more Brent and Little Egrets mixed with Greater and Lesser Black Back Gulls and then there was one final surprise to end the weekend, when we located two Reed Buntings and one Lapland Bunting feeding on the shoreline. A classic winter bird from the Hampshire coast and a great way to end a weekend in the Forest...

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Species List

Birds (H = heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	Feb	
			25	26
1	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		1
2	Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>	1	
3	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	1	1
4	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	1	
5	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>		Many
6	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Many	Many
7	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	1	1
8	Red-breasted Goose	<i>Branta ruficollis</i>		1
9	Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>		Many
10	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		1
11	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		10
12	Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		1
13	Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>		10+
14	Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>		1
15	Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>		Many
16	Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>		Many
17	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>		Many
18	Gadwall	<i>Anna's strepera</i>		Many
19	Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	2	Many
20	Widgeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>		Many
21	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>		10
22	Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	5	
23	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	10+	5
24	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		1
25	Merlin	<i>Falco vespertinus</i>		1
26	Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	1	1
27	Water rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	2	
28	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		Many
29	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		10+
30	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	5	10+
31	Knot	<i>Calidris canuta</i>		Many
32	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>		2
33	Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	5	5
34	Golden plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>		Many
35	Grey plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>		Many
36	Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>		Many
37	Ringed plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>		2
38	Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>		Many
39	Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		Many
40	Spotted redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>		2
41	Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>		10
42	Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		Many
43	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		Many
44	Bar Tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>		Many
45	Black tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>		Many
46	Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>		
47	Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		Many

	Common name	Scientific name	Feb	
			25	26
48	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	Many	Many
49	Great black backed gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>		Many
50	Lesser black backed gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		Many
51	Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>		10+
52	Mediterranean Gull	<i>Ichthyæetus melanocephalus</i>		2
53	Common gull	<i>Larus canus</i>		5
54	Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	10+	10+
55	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		4
56	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	10+	10+
57	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	10+	10+
58	Tawny Owl	<i>Sytix aluco</i>	H	H
59	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	1	1
60	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>	1	
61	Green woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	2	2
62	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	10+	10+
63	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>		2
64	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	1	1
65	Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>		1
66	Rock pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>		4
67	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	1	1
68	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	1	3
69	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	1	3
70	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	Many	Many
71	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	Many	Many
72	Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>	1	1
73	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	1	4
74	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	1	6
75	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	10+	10+
76	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		5
77	Redwings	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	Many	Many
78	Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	Many	Many
79	Dartford warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>		2
80	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	H	H
81	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	1	1
82	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>		5
83	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		1
84	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	10	10+
85	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>		10+
86	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		3
87	Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		10
88	Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	1	
89	Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		10+
90	Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		1
91	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	Many	Many
92	Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	1	Many
93	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		2
94	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	1	Many
95	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	Many	Many
96	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		Many
97	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	1	Many
98	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	2	

	Common name	Scientific name	Feb	
			25	26
99	Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>	Many	Many
100	Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	10+	10+
101	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	H	Many
102	Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	2	
103	Redpoll	<i>Carduelis flammea</i>	Many	H
104	Linnet	<i>Acanthis cannabina</i>		5
105	Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	2	6
106	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	4	6
107	Lapland bunting	<i>Calcarius lapponicus</i>		1
108	Dark eyed junco	<i>Junco hyemalis</i>	1	



Great Grey Shrike