

Winter in the New Forest

Naturetrek Tour Report

10th – 12th March 2023



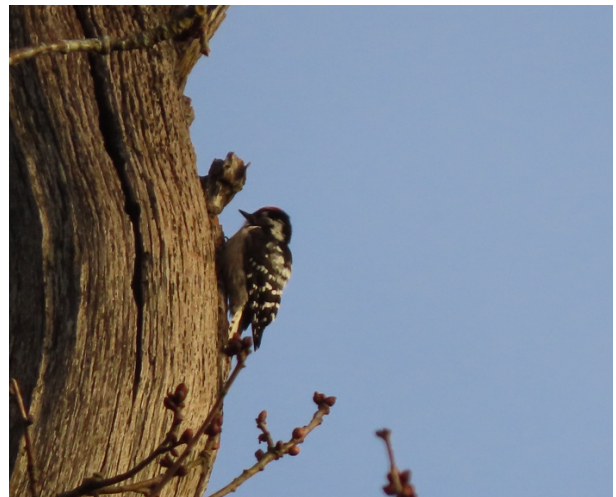
Little Egret, Keyhaven Marshes



Waiting for the Goshawks



Birds in all directions!



Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (male)

Tour report and images by Jonathan Mycock



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Tour participants: Jonathan Mycock (Leader) with 6 Naturetrek clients

Summary

Tour leader Jonathan Mycock, together with six Naturetrek clients, spent an enjoyable weekend birdwatching in the New Forest and on the Hampshire coast. Based at the very comfortable New Forest Lodge, Lyndhurst, in the centre of the New Forest, the group went on two early morning excursions to see/hear Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers before breakfast, both of which proved successful.

On the Saturday the group focussed mainly on heathland, valley mire and woodland habitats. Highlights included a female Merlin, displaying Lapwings, several Stonechats and a very tame mixed flock of Tits, Nuthatches and Chaffinches.

On Sunday the group were treated to a pair of Goshawks displaying at Acres Down, along with several Firecrests singing in the woodland. This was followed by a multitude of waders, including Avocet, Greenshank, Snipe and Ruff at Lymington and Keyhaven Marshes. Wildfowl included some close-up Brent Geese on the saltmarsh, colourful Teal and Shoveler on the brackish pools, elegant Pintail and a male Red-breasted Merganser with a fine 'punk' crest!

Despite the rather grey and windy weather, a total of 85 bird species was seen or heard, together with three species of mammal.

Day 1

Friday 10th March

Jonathan met the six clients in the bar area of the New Forest Lodge Hotel before dinner, and ran through the itinerary for the weekend. Jonathan gave a brief talk about the New Forest, which was originally declared a Royal Hunting Forest by King William of Normandy, and everyone introduced themselves.

Day 2

Saturday 11th March

Rising early, half the group met Jonathan at 06.30 in the hotel lobby to drive the short distance to Acres Down, NNW of Lyndhurst. Upon our arrival, the woodland was already full of birdsong, including many Blackbirds, Song Thrushes, Robins, together with a few Goldcrests and Firecrests. We walked along a surfaced track to a tall dead Silver Birch tree and waited for Woodpecker activity. En-route to the dead tree, we had already heard the 'yaffling' call of a Green Woodpecker and heard the drumming of a Great Spotted Woodpecker. Above the trees, a group of Redwings flew over. Soon, a male Great Spotted Woodpecker alighted on the tree and began hammering at the dead bark. Eventually, Jonathan heard a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker drumming within the woodland adjacent to the dead tree, so the group retraced our steps along the track before moving to the woodland edge. A candidate dead tree was located and eventually we picked up the diminutive woodpecker, which was feeding and drumming near the tips of the dead branches. Feeling elated, we had to pull ourselves away so as not to be late for breakfast! After breakfast we drove south-eastwards along the Beaulieu Road before parking near the train station. We headed off on a 3km circular walk, first passing the valley mire at Shatterford Bottom, where we saw Cotton Grass, *Eriophorum vaginatum*, in flower, along with several species of *Sphagnum* moss. A pair of Stonechats proved very obliging, feeding close to the track. Further along we crossed an ancient boundary bank known as 'Bishop's Dyke'.

Whilst scanning for Dartford Warblers, Jonathan picked up a small grey-brown falcon hunting along the bank in low-level flight - a female Merlin, a regular but uncommon winter visitor to the area. It landed in a distant small tree and Brian was able to photograph it with his powerful lens and confirm the identification.

Pressing on we came to a stream and an area of pools where two pairs of Lapwings were displaying, and a pair of Grey Wagtails provided some colour to the drab winter landscape. Several pairs of Buzzard and a lone Red Kite were played on the wind.

We then walked through the ancient trees of Denny Wood, one of the 'Ancient and Ornamental Woodlands of the New Forest. Lunch was taken at the Drift Restaurant in the Beaulieu Inn, after which we headed back in the Lyndhurst direction. A slight detour took us to a car park near the Denny Wood camp site, where many small birds had learnt to come close to food provided by photographers. Their tameness was demonstrated when Jonathan held out some pieces of cereal bar in his hand and immediately, a few tits, Nuthatches and Chaffinches descended like leaves blowing off the trees. The group were even able to photograph Marsh Tits landing on Jonathan's outstretched hand!

We ended the afternoon at Acres Down, where we climbed onto a heathy ridge with distant views over mixed woodland. Here we spent time scanning for raptors, this being one of the most reliable and well-known sites for Goshawk. Unfortunately, the weather was not co-operative, with low cloud and drizzle making the visibility poor, so after a short walk around we returned to the hotel. After another excellent dinner we ran through the checklist and then discussed the next day's itinerary before retiring for the evening.

Day 3

Sunday 12th March

Rising early, half the group met Jonathan at 06.30 for another early visit to Acres Down. En-route to the 'drumming tree', a Treecreeper and several Firecrests were observed next to the track. A pair of Stock Doves had taken over the top of the dead tree, but after a wait of 10-15 minutes, first one, then a second Lesser Spotted Woodpecker alighted. There was a brief burst of drumming by the male, before the pair started mating and then flew around on slow wingbeats in a magical display flight, which was all very exciting! We then headed back to the New Forest Lodge for breakfast, after which some of the group checked out of the hotel.

We then returned to Acres Down and climbed onto the ridge to try again for Goshawks. After about 15 minutes, Jonathan picked up a pair of raptors circling in the distance, and though the telescope they were identified as Goshawks. Through the 'scope the rollercoaster display flight could be observed, though these shy birds could easily have been over a mile away! Jonathan ensured that all the group members obtained views through the 'scope, since this was one of the 'target species' that everyone had wanted to see.

Our next destination was the Lymington and Keyhaven Marshes nature reserve on the Hampshire coast. The first area we visited was Normandy Marsh, and in the flooded fields adjacent to the footpath, a mixture of Brent and Greylag Geese, Shelduck and Curlew were feeding. Further on, a shallow pool held several species of wader, including Avocet, Black-tailed Godwit and Greenshank. In the distance, a male Marsh Harrier was hunting over the saltmarsh, causing havoc among the flocks of waders. Lunch was beckoning, so we headed on to Barton-on-Sea and the Beachcomber Café, which turned out to be quite a gem! Having partaken of soup, sandwiches and Dorset apple cake, we attempted to look for Purple Sandpipers on the rock groyne below. However, there was a

high tide, and the inshore wind was causing a lot of spray, making visibility very poor. Cutting our losses, we headed to Keyhaven and walked along the edge of the harbour and into the western end of the reserve. Among the boats were some Mute Swans and a very smart male Red-breasted Merganser. Further on, a flock of Brent Geese were feeding quite close to the path, allowing good views, and then some local birders pointed out a pair of Common Snipe, which were very well-camouflaged against the rushy wetland. We encountered a series of pools which held various wildfowl and waders, including colourful Teal, Pintail and Shoveler, Dunlin and Ruff and a few Lesser Black-backed Gulls. By now, the rain had become quite heavy, so we completed our afternoon's walk, boarded the minibus and made our return drive to the hotel, where we said our goodbyes.

All in all, everyone agreed that we'd had an enjoyable and productive weekend, with great food and accommodation and excellent company. A total of 85 bird species was seen or heard, a good number considering the weather conditions!

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

Common name	Scientific name	March 2023	
		11	12
Brent Goose	<i>Branta bernicla</i>		✓
Canada Goose - I	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓	✓
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		6
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		4
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>		✓
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>		✓
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>		8
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>		✓
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>		3
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		✓
Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>		1 M
Common Pheasant - I	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>		3
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	✓	✓
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		✓
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		✓
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		1
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>		3
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>		✓
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>		3
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	4	
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>		1
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>		✓
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>		✓
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		1
Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>		1
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		✓
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		2
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		✓
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>		1
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		✓
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>		✓
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>		✓
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		3
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		✓
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		1

Common name	Scientific name	March 2023	
		11	12
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		2
Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	2	
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>		1 M
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	1	
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates minor</i>	1	2
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓	✓
European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	H	H
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	1 F	
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓	✓
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>		1
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>		3
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓
Coal Tit	<i>Parus 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>	✓	✓
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>		H
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	✓	✓
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		
Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>	✓	✓
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	✓	✓
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	✓	✓
Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	✓	✓
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	✓	✓
Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	✓	
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓
European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	✓
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	2	
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓

Common name	Scientific name	March 2023	
		11	12
European Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>		1
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓	✓
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>	1	
Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>		1

Mammals

Common name	Scientific name	March 2023	
		11	12
Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>	2	
Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>	1	
European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	1	