

The Forest of Dean

Naturetrek Tour Report

15 - 17 February 2019

Report by Greg Mabbett



Naturetrek

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Tour participants: Greg Mabbett (Naturetrek leader) with five Naturetrek clients

Summary

We enjoyed a fantastic weekend searching for wildlife in many different habitats of this ancient forest. Tour highlights included encountering Wild Boar on four different occasions, in the day and night! A visit to Symonds Yat was memorable with Goshawk, Sparrowhawk, Red Kite and the resident pair of Peregrines all seen well from our high vantage point, alongside super views of Hawfinch in good numbers.

Day 1

Friday 15th February

We started our weekend by meeting in our private dining room at 6.30pm for an introduction, a brief run through of the itinerary and the species we are likely to encounter. After getting to know everyone and enjoying a delicious three-course meal, we made our way out for our first night drive. Not long into our search, we soon found a sounder of three Wild Boar feeding on the verge, giving excellent views before moving back into the forest. We carried on a loop drive back to the hotel finding five Fallow Deer. A really fantastic start!

Day 2

Saturday 16th February

We started our first morning with a pre-breakfast walk at Parkend in the hope of seeing Hawfinch. We made our way out at 7am and positioned ourselves on the village green and waited to see what we could see and hear. Song Thrush, Long tailed Tit, Green Woodpecker and Greenfinch were all singing and calling in the Lime trees. After 45 minutes, our first Hawfinch was located and was soon joined by two more with a couple seen flying overhead. After enjoying excellent views of the Hawfinch, we made our way back for breakfast.

After breakfast, we made our way to Nags Head RSPB reserve and embarked on a loop walk around the long trail. With the sun shining, the woods were alive with bird song. As we got out of the van, a single Lesser Redpoll was calling and landed in a tree overhead. We made our way through the woods with Song Thrush, Chaffinch, a range of tits and Treecreeper all singing. Further along the track a small herd of Fallow Deer were spotted along with a sounder of Wild Boar feeding on the edge of the thick cover, but they soon melted back into the woodland. We carried on to find a feeding flock of Siskin giving excellent views in the scope and three Hawfinch flew across the tree tops. When we reached the open glade at the top of the trail, Buzzard, Crossbill, Siskin and pair of Mistle Thrush were all seen well. We slowly made our way back down to the van, encountering more of the common species.

After recharging with lunch in Parkend, we were ready for the afternoon activities. We made the short trip to Parked church where we went for a walk through the woodland to an open glade and back. A male Bullfinch from the car park was a great start, followed by a Treecreeper and Goldfinch. We then made our way to the open glade where a pair of Crossbills were located with the male sitting proud on the very top of a Spruce giving excellent views. As we made our way back, a Raven flew over calling with a beak full of nesting material.

The next stop was quick look over Woorgreens Lake where the highlight was excellent views of seven Goosander.

Our last port of call for the day was Horse Lawn, a lovely glade surrounded by Pine, Spruce and Larch. Making our way along the glade, a flock of Goldfinch with a pair of Mistle Thrush were showing well in a stand-alone tree. Seemingly out of nowhere, a flock of eight noisy Crossbills flew overhead followed by another pair, with the male stopping briefly in the top of a tree. Further along the track, a Lesser Redpoll was found quietly feeding in a Hemlock tree. Moving through the woodland, a few more common species of bird were seen. Nearing the end of the walk, a male Muntjac Deer was spotted feeding on the edge of a Larch block, giving good views as it slowly made its way into thicker cover. A great way to end the day before we made our way back to the hotel.

After having an hour or so free time, the group met up for a delicious three-course meal and then a run through the checklist of species we had seen that day. Afterwards, we made our way out for another night drive. We had more success, with a single large Wild Boar feeding near the road. But the highlight was a perched Tawny Owl, sat out for all to see before gliding back into the woodland. After such a successful outing, we made our way back to the hotel.

Day 3

Sunday 17th February

We started the day with a pre-breakfast walk from the hotel to the Cyril Heart Arboretum, where there is a large feeding log to see what we could find. Three Fallow Deer bucks were seen with their huge antlers as they were grazing on the field before making their way into the wood as the sun came up. Good views of the more common species of woodland bird including a pair of Great Spotted Woodpeckers seen feeding on the log and interacting high in the canopy. With time running out, we made our way back to the hotel for breakfast.

As we were waiting by the van to leave the hotel, a pair of Hawfinches gave a lovely flyby, calling as they went. At Cannop Ponds, a pair of Goshawks gave brief views over the wood as we walked down to the lake. Plenty of Mandarin Duck were showing off their beautiful plumage along with, Little Grebe and Tufted Duck. Some well-placed seed on the path produced a good feeding response from the tits and waterfowl with Marsh Tit and Nuthatch coming to the seed very close by, along with half the ducks from the lake it seemed! A great way to get good views of these species. A Grey Wagtail also joined them for a short while.

Symonds Yat was our next stop, where we stayed for a couple of hours to give ourselves the best chance of seeing raptors. Arriving at the viewpoint, the resident pair of Peregrine were perched near the nest site but unfortunately didn't do much else during our stay. Keeping keen eyes over the adjacent woods paid off with a pair of Goshawk and Sparrowhawk putting on a fantastic display on and off whenever the sun was shining. Down on the river beneath, Goosander were present, with a couple of Buzzards soaring beneath us giving a great view from above. As the afternoon wore on, two Red Kites joined the soaring Buzzards. The small feeding station here provided more close views of several woodland species, especially the Nuthatch.

After lunch, the last site we were visiting was Brierley where we enjoyed a big loop walk. There was some logging taking place, but thankfully it didn't seem to put the birds off too much. We started the walk with plenty of Siskins calling overhead and then good views of a small perched flock in a Larch. A Goshawk was seen briefly, soaring high over the wood and we had great views of a perched Buzzard.

We made our way across the top track next to the Larch woodland seeing more Siskin and Goldfinch. We also found a very tame Nuthatch just sitting on a branch for three minutes, giving excellent views. We relocated the

perched Buzzard, getting even better views. Just as we reached the end of the walk, a Goldcrest was found feeding in an open tree next to the van. A great way to finish.

On the drive back, a single female Wild Boar was seen with a number of hoglets, giving excellent views before charging off into cover. What a fantastic way to end a wildlife filled weekend.

Back at the hotel we ran through the checklist one last time and said our goodbyes before heading our separate ways.

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Species Lists

Birds (✓=recorded but not counted; H = heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	February		
			15	16	17
1	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		6	10
2	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>			2
3	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		2	2
4	Mandarin Duck	<i>Aix galericulata</i>			12
5	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		2	14
6	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>			8
7	Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>		7	6
8	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>		1	
9	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			3
10	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		1	2
11	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>			2
12	Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>			5
13	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		2	3
14	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>			1
15	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		6	8
16	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>			40
17	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>			1
18	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		1	
19	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		4	
20	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		7	20
21	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>			1
22	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>		1	
23	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		1	2
24	European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		1	
25	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			2
26	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		8	2
27	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		4	
28	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>		2	4
29	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		5	6
30	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		2	5
31	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		c10	c10
32	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>			2
33	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		20	20
34	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		20	20
35	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		4	2
36	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		H	2
37	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		1	1
38	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		10	3
39	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		6	2
40	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		10	5
41	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>		25	5
42	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		20	
43	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		5	4
44	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		4	2
45	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		1	1
46	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>			1
47	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>		3	

	Common name	Scientific name	February		
			15	16	17
48	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		20	20
49	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>		6	2
50	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		2	
51	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		6	4
52	Common Redpoll	<i>Acanthis flammea</i>		4	
53	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>		12	1
54	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		20	5
55	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		30	25

Mammals

1	Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>	9	4	5
2	Muntjac Deer	<i>Muntiacus reevesi</i>		1	1
3	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>	3	5	8
4	European Badger	<i>Meles meles</i>	1		
5	Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>		10	5