

# The Forest of Dean

Naturetrek Tour Report

1 - 3 March 2019



Adder



Goldcrest singing



European Nuthatch



Common Lizard

Report compiled by Ed Drewitt  
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Tour participants: Ed Drewitt and Chris Griffin (leaders) with 14 Naturetrek clients

## Summary

After a glorious spring-season week running up to this holiday, many flowers and trees were slightly ahead of the game for this time of the year. With some warm sunshine on day 2, we had exceptional views of an Adder and two Common Lizards. Despite more seasonal rain on day 3, birds were in the breeding mood with birdsong all throughout the forest, from Chaffinches to Treecreepers and Nuthatches to Song Thrushes. We even heard, and some saw, a singing Firecrest – a nationally rare bird. Hawfinches perched in the tops of trees at a favoured spot, Crossbills gave fly-over views and Bramblings were feeding amongst Chaffinches. Raptors were busy re-establishing territorial boundaries with Buzzards and a Goshawk soaring overhead or in the distance. Night-time ventures after dinner revealed one group, known as sounder, of Wild Boar - a familiar mammal now, living in the forest – alongside several Foxes. During the day we caught up with the common deer in the Dean, Fallow Deer. Damp conditions were ideal for frogs and toads, and we spent time watching frogs courting amongst spawn at Nagshead. A close fly-by Goshawk finished off the weekend nicely.

## Day 1

### Friday 1st March

After a day of travels for many, our group of 14 met with Ed and Chris at 6.30pm to find out more about what was in store for the weekend. After a delicious meal at the Speech House Hotel and a chance to catch up after dinner, we headed out at 9.30pm – an ideal time for looking for some of the Forest's large mammals close to the quieter roads. After 50 minutes we hadn't seen a thing; however, as we headed back via Parkend, Ed suddenly spotted stripy boarlets – three-week old young boar – by the roadside. They didn't mind our presence as Ed crept forward, allowing the group in the van behind to also see. Further into the woods, two adults, no doubt their mum and perhaps a friend or aunt, were nearby. The boarlets moved back into the woods so we headed back to the hotel, although not before seeing a fox in our torchlight before it melted away into the darkness.

## Day 2

### Saturday 2nd March

We arose to a bright morning, and headed out at 7am for a pre-breakfast opportunity to see some early birds not too far down the road. Along the way we paused to see up to five stag Fallow Deer, showing signs of gentle rutting. In the centre of Parkend, amongst a set of Yew trees, we spent time listening for the metallic hammer-like 'tick tick' calls of Hawfinches. While we waited, lots of Great Tits were singing all around, joined by Coal Tits. By 7.30am three Hawfinches flew overhead calling and settled in the taller Lime trees giving brilliant views through the scope. A male and female were viewed together, allowing us to see their differences alongside both their distinctive orange-cream plumage, white-tipped tails and paler wing bars. They flew off and over the next 20 minutes we saw several others, usually flying over in pairs. A flock of 20 Siskins also bounced overhead and landed in a nearby Alder tree, also allowing everyone to have satisfying views. Other birds included a pair of Long-tailed Tits, Jackdaws, Pied Wagtails and Chaffinches.

We headed back for breakfast at 8am, enjoying a buffet breakfast including a well-earned cooked selection. An hour later we met again in the car park, hearing calls of a Greenfinch and seeing a Sparrowhawk flying off with a Blackbird or thrush in its talons. Redwings had been feeding on the field by the hotel alongside two Mistle Thrushes. We headed back out to Parkend and the RSPB's Nagshead nature reserve. Mike spotted perhaps the

same Fallow Deer and we turned round along the way to see a Wild Boar closer, although sadly, it appeared injured.

At Nagshead the weather was bright, and we spent just under two hours exploring the trail, finding Jays, Nuthatches, singing Treecreepers, courting Blue Tits and plenty of singing Great Tits; there was even a Wren carrying nest material. We had a particular treat when Ed and Chris picked up the song of a Firecrest coming from some nearby Holly trees. We spent some time looking for the bird, and for some it appeared in a Holly, showing the white line running across each eye. Meanwhile, a nearby Goldcrest was also singing for immediate comparison. Admiring the stand of Oak trees, some dead and rotting, and the myriad of dead wood, it all looked perfect foraging habitat for woodpeckers; we spotted several Great Spotted Woodpeckers and heard a male drumming. Despite the forecast, we had some lovely warm sunshine lighting up the woodland. As we headed out onto the main road, we paused briefly to watch a Treecreeper very close by.

By 11am we headed back through Parkend and up the road to New Fancy View, an old coal spoil heap landscaped into a viewpoint for visitors. Although cloudier, the wind was helping half a dozen Buzzards to soar and display over their territories while up to seven Ravens were spotted flying together. A pair of Crossbills flew overhead several times, allowing everyone to hear their calls. Siskins were also common. Close by, on the wooden beams of the viewpoint wall and beneath a flowering Gorse bush, we had incredibly close views of two Common Lizards, curled up or flattened out on the wood to absorb the sun's warmth. Against the weathered wood and rusty nails the lizards were incredibly cryptic. Chris nipped off to look for something else that would be exciting in this later-winter warmth, an Adder. And with success Chris came back to beckon us down to spot his prize. There, by a Gorse bush, a male Adder was curled up and, like the lizards, incredibly camouflaged. We spent some time admiring the Adder and noticing his copper-coloured eyes, vertical slit pupils, olive-green skin and black diamond-shaped markings. After stretching himself out a little he finally slithered off into the undergrowth; a fitting time for us to head back to the vehicles for lunch.

We had a delicious lunch at the Fountain Inn pub in Parkend, enjoying a choice of soup or scrumptious ciabattas with chips and salad. Before we headed off, we explored the stream behind the pub and with some patience caught up with the local Dipper, whose signs on the rocks (white poo) were evident everywhere. Although shy, everyone finally spotted it. A Kingfisher dashed through the woodland at one point, a Grey Wagtail gave brief glimpses, while others enjoyed a Nuthatch foraging in nearby trees. Other birds included singing Great Tits, calling Hawfinches high in the trees and Buzzards overhead.

Our post-lunch venue was Blaize Bailey, an area of forest on the east side of the Dean with a viewpoint looking out across the Severn and Vale of Berkeley. Although the weather was feeling moodier, we had a lovely walk, immersing ourselves in the forest as we walked along the tracks and beneath the Douglas Fir trees. We hoped to see Brambling and our patience paid off. Three perched briefly in an Ash tree and we could see many Chaffinches coming down to feed in an adjacent horse field. However, later on we encountered a flock of Chaffinches feeding amongst the leaf litter beneath Beech trees. Ed spotted a flock lift off with white rumps – Bramblings! There were around 20, although once we began scanning with binoculars, they were incredibly hard to see. Chris managed to find one in the scope, enabling everyone to see the detail of the bird, including the white back and rump. Their coloration is superbly suited for hiding in this habitat. A singing Hawfinch remained elusive and although Ed found it, the bird flew off as the group began to make their way over.

We finished here around 4pm and on our way towards the hotel we stopped at the top of Soudley Ponds where we enjoyed the displaying frolics of just over 25 Mandarin Ducks, the males flicking their heads to show off. Accompanying them - aside from the farmyard Mallards and a beautiful male Muscovy Duck – were Moorhens, Mallards, a Grey Wagtail, two Little Grebes (including one which rested long enough to be seen through a scope) and tits and a Nuthatch coming to nearby feeders. We headed back to the hotel for 5pm and met again at 6.30pm for the checklist and plan for the next day.

After another delicious three-course meal, half of the group met again at 9.30pm for an evening scan for wildlife through the forest. It was raining and reasonably quiet on the roads, apart from many passing Common Toads, heading to their breeding lakes. We had good views of a healthy Fox with a bushy white-tipped tail, and another disappearing into a road verge in Parkend. After 40 minutes we headed back, avoiding any further toads. In the field adjacent to the hotel a scan with the flash torch revealed a year-old Fallow Deer feeding on the far side, its eyes catching the light.

## Day 3

## Sunday 3rd March

With today's rainy forecast we had a slightly earlier breakfast, at 7.30am, and made our plan! It was drizzly first thing; however, the morning's forecast was better than the afternoon, so we headed to Yat Rock, where Chris had worked for the RSPB for six months some years ago. Yat Rock, as well as being a famous landmark in the Forest of Dean, is also an excellent place for seeing Peregrines which have been using the cliffs for breeding since 1982. On arrival, the front bus just caught sight of a Muntjac. Despite the drizzle, we had an excellent morning and while the Peregrine cliff was covered in mist, we spotted: a pair of Kingfishers beneath us on the river – they were visiting some nest holes in the river bank too, Canada Geese – including an unusual cliff-nesting pair, a swirling flock of Common Gulls, a Grey Heron, blue-grey Stock Doves, Cormorants, Mute Swans and a female Goosander following behind two swans. On the other side of the river a small group of Fallow Deer trotted across an open area of Bracken. Suddenly we heard a Peregrine calling and shortly after, the mist cleared to reveal a female Peregrine perched next to her nest ledge. A little later the male was perched a little lower beneath her. Ravens were also obliging, flying past at our level; one perched in a nearby tree preening in the rain. Chris put down some peanuts in nearby nooks and crannies on the trees attracting a very tame Nuthatch, Coal Tits, Great Tits and Blue Tits. In the nearby Yew trees a male Goldcrest was singing and gradually revealed himself to the group. By 10.30am we were ready for a cuppa and we all headed for the café for a coffee or tea.

Despite all feeling a little damp at this point, we travelled back into the heart of the Forest and went back to Nagshead, in particular to the Campbell Hide to seek some shelter. We spent an hour looking out over the pond and the woody slope while serenaded by a singing Mistle Thrush, living up to its reputation and alternative name, Storm Cock. For much of this time we were entertained by around 20 Common Frogs frolicking in the pond. We were able to watch all sorts of breeding behaviour happening around clumps of laid spawn and spend time looking closer at frogs from their cryptic markings to their long, trailing legs.

Lunch was calling so we headed back to the hotel for 1pm and enjoyed sandwiches, baguettes or jacket potatoes and a chance to dry off. We bid farewell to some of the group who wanted to make tracks. However, despite the rainy forecast and winds of Storm Freya, nine of the group remained with Ed and Chris to continue exploring the forest. We headed for Cannop Ponds, and did a circuit of the lower pond spotting a dashing male Pied

Wagtail in his spring plumage, a Grey Wagtail, Tufted Ducks, Coots, Mandarin Ducks, Little Grebes, a pair of Mute Swans, Moorhens, Great Spotted Woodpecker, two Ravens, Buzzards and a few Cormorants. We then stopped by a bird feeding stations, watching Great Tits, Blue Tits, Coal Tits and Chaffinches coming down to feed. They were accompanied by a Nuthatch, an occasional Marsh Tit and several female Siskins. Mallards and Mandarin Ducks slowly edged closer to take advantage of the food. The rain was on and off, and clouds rushing by overhead. However, the weather was much better than forecast so we moved on to our final location by Parkend Church.

Incredibly, the sun appeared for a short while, lifting the colours of the fir trees and wintry-looking Larch; the weather was intermittent showers. We walked down one track alongside a riparian area of woodland with plenty of dead wood and trees for woodpeckers. Great Tits, Coal Tits and a pair of Long-tailed Tits were the most we saw. However, we then headed up to an open space of recently felled young fir trees and spent some time waiting. Small groups of Siskins bounced overhead and a small group of Goldfinches stopped at the top of a Larch. Three Crossbills also flew over alongside the odd Buzzard and Ravens. We wandered back down the track at 4.30pm and as Chris and Ed looked up to the alarm calls of small birds, a Woodpigeon flew over. However, Chris then spotted another bird, a larger raptor and Ed called Goshawk. Indeed, it was, and it flew behind stand of trees before coming into view over the open track and disappearing off. This was the icing on the cake and a brilliant end to this tour.

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## Species Lists

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

	Common name	Scientific name	March		
			1	2	3
1	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>			6+
2	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		5	4
3	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>			9
4	Mandarin Duck	<i>Aix galericulata</i>		25	✓
5	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓	✓
6	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>			✓
7	Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>			1
8	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>		✓	1
9	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		2	2+
10	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>			1
11	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			5+
12	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		4	
13	Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>		1+	1
14	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		12+	6+
15	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		4	✓
16	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		h	✓
17	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		100+	
18	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>			100+
19	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		✓	✓
20	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		4	2
21	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		✓	✓
22	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	h	h	
23	Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>		1	2
24	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		3	2+
25	European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		h	h
26	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			2
27	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		4	2+
28	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		✓	✓
29	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>		✓	✓
30	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		✓	✓
31	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		10	6+
32	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		✓	✓
33	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>			1
34	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓
35	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓
36	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		2	2
37	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		h	1
38	Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>		1	
39	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		✓	
40	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		6+	2+
41	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		2	h
42	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓
43	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>		✓	✓
44	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		h	2
45	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		4	2+
46	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓	✓
47	White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>		1	



	Common name	Scientific name	March		
			1	2	3
48	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		h	
49	Duncock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓	✓
50	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		2	1
51	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>		2	1
52	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓
53	Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>		20+	
54	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>		7+	
55	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		1	
56	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>		3	3
57	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓
58	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		✓	✓

### Other Taxa

1	Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>	3	13	6
2	Muntjac Deer	<i>Muntiacus reevesi</i>			1
3	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>	6	1	
4	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	1	2	
5	Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>		✓	✓
6	Adder	<i>Vipera berus</i>		1	
7	Common Lizard	<i>Zootoca vivipara</i>		2	
8	Common Frog	<i>Rana temporaria</i>			20+
9	Common Toad	<i>Bufo bufo</i>		✓	
10	Bumblebee (White- or Buff-tailed)	<i>Bombus sp.</i>		1	



Mandarin Duck



Common Frog