

The Forest of Dean

Naturetrek Tour Report

8 - 10 March 2019

Report by Marcus John



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Tour participants: Marcus John (leader) and eight Naturetrek clients

Introduction

The Forest of Dean is an ancient royal hunting forest where areas of oak woodland are interspersed with more conventional coniferous plantation. The rich history of this area is reflected in the mosaic of habitats that have been preserved within its historic boundaries. The great diversity of bird species includes several scarce breeders, including Hawfinch, Crossbill and Goshawk. Mammals that reside within the forest include Wild Boar, Fallow and Roe Deer. We enjoyed a memorable weekend visiting key sites across the forest, with great views of a wide range of special birds and several interesting mammals. In addition, we had a very memorable encounter with a pair of confiding Adders.

Day 1

Friday 8th March

We met together before dinner in a private room in the historic Speech House Hotel. Our leader, Marcus John, gave us an introduction to the natural history of the area, outlining our itinerary for the tour and the target species that we hoped to see. We then enjoyed the first of several excellent meals, which added to our enjoyment throughout the weekend.

After dinner we set out on our first evening drive in search of nocturnal mammals and quickly saw a medium-sized mustelid run across the road. On careful reflection, we realised that this was a Polecat, a great find anywhere in the UK! We soon found several Fallow Deer and a solitary Muntjac Deer but we missed out on Wild Boar, despite checking the best areas.

Day 2

Saturday 9th March

We rose early to head out to Parkend to look for Hawfinch before breakfast. First, we spent 10 minutes scanning the treetops from the hotel car park and saw several Greenfinch and Goldfinch, as well as three species of thrush feeding on the lawn. Once at Parkend, before we had even got out of the car, Dave spotted a male Hawfinch in the top of a tall Lime tree. Unfortunately, it flew off before we could line up the telescope, though a couple of us did manage brief views. Although we had seen at least three Fallow Deer on the drive down, we didn't pause on the way back as we were late for breakfast!

After a superb cooked breakfast, we drove to Nagshead RSPB reserve for a walk, just as the morning showers cleared. We enjoyed good views of commoner woodland species like Treecreeper and Nuthatch. Dave heard a calling Lesser Spotted Woodpecker but, unfortunately, it did not show itself. Marcus was able to point out the call of a Goshawk and, sure enough, we soon saw it fly over, just above the canopy.

Our next stop was New Fancy View raptor watch-point. It remained breezy but bright as we scanned the wide view, hoping that the windy weather would not put off the local raptors. After a few minutes we saw our first Goshawk, which was soon joined by a very active pair. We were lucky that they continued to display on and off for over half an hour, affording excellent views. Marcus walked back down the path to look for reptiles and soon we were all treated to point-blank views of two Adders. They were entwined together in the warm sunshine - a real highlight of the whole tour!

After such a successful morning we thoroughly enjoyed our light lunch at The Fountain Inn in Parkend. We went for a short walk and saw the local Dipper flying along the stream that runs around the pub garden.

An afternoon stroll around Cannop Ponds was a nice way to add some new species to the trip list. Everyone enjoyed watching and photographing the elegant Mandarin ducks that breed here in good numbers. We completed our afternoon with a walk around part of Walgreens Nature Reserve, though the windy weather meant that bird activity in this open area was very limited.

We gathered together for dinner in the oak-panelled dining room of our atmospheric hotel to reflect on a hugely enjoyable day with a variety of wildlife. After another delicious meal, we headed out for our second night drive. We saw several Fallow Deer, one group of which were surprisingly tame, allowing us to approach very close. Despite extensive searching, any Wild Boar remained frustratingly elusive.

Day 3

Sunday 10th March

The weather was still windy when we got up 4am for a pre-breakfast visit to Nagshead RSPB reserve. There were lots of birders around hoping to see Hawfinch, but we were all disappointed. It is likely that the mild weather in February had led to the dispersal of the regular winter flock that is seen in this area.

After another delicious breakfast we returned to Parkend to look around the church grounds but to no avail. Thankfully, better luck was in store at Symonds Yat. As we walked out to this famous viewpoint, we were treated to prolonged views of a Nuthatch excavating a new nest hole. When we arrived at the top of Yat Rock, piercing calls alerted us to the presence of a pair of Peregrine Falcons. Almost immediately, they swept overhead in close formation: such a thrilling sight! Everyone then enjoyed the panoramic views of the Wye Valley as the sun shone warmly between showers. Here we had unusual views as we looked down on displaying Common Buzzards and Ravens; several Great Cormorants and a Goosander were on the river, which snaked along 400 feet below us. As we walked back to the car, more Common Buzzards were displaying; to round off our visit, they were soon joined by a soaring Peregrine.

After a light lunch back at the Speech House Hotel, we went for an enjoyable walk around the Horse Lawn area of the forest. Crossbills flew over and we watched Coal and Long-tailed Tits feeding with Siskins in trees right by the path. It was a very enjoyable way to finish off a memorable weekend.

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Species Lists

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

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

	Common name	Scientific name	March		
			8	9	10
48	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓	✓
49	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		1	
50	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>		✓	✓
51	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓
52	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothrustes</i>		1	H
53	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		3	1
54	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>			H
55	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓
56	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		6	H

Other taxa

1	Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>	3	5	
2	Muntjac Deer	<i>Muntiacus reevesi</i>	1	1	
3	Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>		✓	✓
4	Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	1		
5	Polecat	<i>Mustela putorius</i>	1		
6	Adder	<i>Vipera berus</i>		2	

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