

The Forest of Dean

Naturetrek Tour Report

6 - 8 March 2020

Report compiled by Oliver Smart



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Tour participants: Oliver Smart (Leader) with eight Naturetrek clients.

Summary

This famous forest on the borders of England and Wales attracts large numbers of visitors throughout the year. Mountain-bike riders, day-tripping families, walkers, horse-riders, bird watchers and more descend in the search of wildlife, exercise or a pleasant day out. For us it would be all three. The diverse mix of vegetation, connectivity of ponds and rides and specialist species make this an ideal location for an excellent winter break from everyday hustle and bustle.

Day 1

Friday 6th March

Following a last-minute change of group leader due to illness the tour was being led for the first time by Oliver Smart. On arrival and once settled in, we met for dinner and discussed plans for the weekend including a night drive to start things off.

Heading out just before 9pm we drove the inner ring of roads in search of mammals and within a few minutes found Fallow Deer. Heading to Parkend Church scanning the roadside for Wild Boar, we eventually found a lone animal foraging on the edge of the wood. Leaving this young animal, we continued on to Cannop Ponds where we pulled over as we spotted a Red Fox trotting through the undergrowth. From the ponds we walked along the cycle track where we could hear the distinctive hoots of Tawny Owl, whilst we nattered getting to know each other.

Day 2

Saturday 7th March

The morning started overcast and this remained the case throughout the day with a wind increasing in strength, which by the afternoon both helped and hindered our birdwatching.

As we waited for the group to assemble, we scanned nearby grazed fields and picked up dozens of Redwing and Mistle Thrush as well as calling Greenfinch and Coal Tit around the car park. In the hour prior to breakfast we headed into Parkend in search of Hawfinch, yet despite our failure on that score we connected with a number of other species including Song Thrush in full voice.

After a substantial breakfast, we headed off for the day and looped the forest stopping off at a number of locations, but not before the leader heard and saw two Hawfinch. Unfortunately, everyone had returned to their rooms to get ready for the day! A local search when everyone joined up failed to produce the target species.

New Fancy View in early mist was atmospheric but equally rewarding with a male Crossbill landing within 50 metres of the hilltop. A pair of Goshawks displayed off in the distance showing their deep wing-beats and flight pattern and contrasted nicely with several Buzzards.

Dropping into Organ's Green we had to avoid a road closure so walked the length of river from the bridge to the north to the picnic site. Two Dippers showed briefly and most of the group were able to identify them. Some

disturbance made locating them again rather tricky but good views and sounds from Nuthatch and other common species made it a pleasant wander.

After lunch at the Fountain Inn we checked the stream behind the pub but could not locate any further Dipper before heading to Woorgreens for a walk around the lake and up on to Crabtree Hill. The pool only produced Tufted Duck, Canada & Greylag Goose, Coot and Moorhen but it did produce a lot of mud and the group slipped and squelched to the main ride heading to the hill. From the hard track we skirted the edge of some coniferous trees where the leader encountered a small mixed flock including Siskin and one Common Redpoll.

Possibly the highlight of the whole trip was shortly to show itself. Hunkering in the leese of some small trees a Great Grey Shrike perched motionless, albeit swaying in the wind. Everyone was thrilled with the 100m distant views; however, our return track was right alongside its position. Every 20 metres we stopped and scoped the bird again, finally getting down to 20m from the bird. Its plumage was striking and bright seen so close and the group were privileged to be rewarded for a long day in the field. It wasn't over however, as we spotted four Goosander heading for the lake and Linnet and Meadow Pipit called as they flew overhead.

The evening continued with the log of the day's sightings and then a substantial dinner. Following that we headed out once more in search of nocturnal species and apart from a few more deer and three Rabbits we heard five Tawny Owls and also one flew across the road right in front of the vehicle.

Day 3

Sunday 8th March

Our final morning & it started well with Oliver hearing Hawfinch as soon as he opened the door to his room! Thankfully on this occasion he was able to corral the group and a short amble down the hill to the west of the hotel produced beautiful views of this delightful but tough-looking finch species. The sun had emerged and the adult male was gleaming in the warm early morning light. Whilst on the track we collected our first daytime views of a group of about six Wild Boar as they trotted almost silently through the thicket.

After a buffet breakfast we drove the short distance to Cannop Pond. A walk from the stone works around the southern lake produced many common species, but in particular Mandarin, a Marsh Tit and pair of Siskins feeding from bird seed put out for them. A short view of Great Spotted Woodpecker calling from the top of a tree was also nice for most. Grey Wagtail yet again eluded us on this walk but a newt species was spotted in one of the roadside pools. Unfortunately, many frogs were found squished here too, suggesting this was a popular crossing point from the pools towards the main ponds.

Heading to Nagshead RSPB reserve we had wonderful views of a Wren building its nest in the root-ball of a fallen tree and our first Treecreeper too, scaling an oak in front of the hide. The distinctive deep "yikking" calls of a Goshawk and a brief flight through the forest was a nice background distraction to the common birds. There were early signs of spring in the woods here too and plenty of Wild Boar activity with uprooted bluebells.

After a pleasant and filling lunch at The Speech House Hotel, those that remained headed to Symonds Yat. It appears the two Peregrine Falcons we spotted here had been usurped from the cliffs by Canada Geese and a lone female Goosander on the river below and a circling Red Kite were the only other species of note. A search

nearby for Little Owl drew a blank, but large flocks of Common & Black-headed Gulls on flooded farmland were a pleasing end to a wonderful weekend.

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Species Lists

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

	Common name	Scientific name	March		
			6	7	8
1	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		✓	✓
2	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		✓	✓
3	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>			✓
4	Mandarin Duck	<i>Aix galericulata</i>			✓
5	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓	✓
6	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>		✓	✓
7	Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>		4	1
8	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>		✓	✓
9	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			✓
10	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			✓
11	Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>		2	3
12	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>			1
13	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓	✓
14	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		✓	✓
15	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		✓	✓
16	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		✓	✓
17	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</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>		✓	✓
25	European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>			H
26	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			✓
27	Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanus excubitor</i>		1	
28	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		✓	✓
29	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		✓	✓
30	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>		✓	✓
31	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		✓	✓
32	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓
33	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		✓	✓
34	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>		✓	✓
35	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓
36	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓
37	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		✓	✓
38	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		✓	✓
39	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		✓	✓
40	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		✓	✓
41	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>			✓
42	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>			✓
43	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓
44	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>		✓	✓
45	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		✓	✓
46	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		✓	✓
47	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	March		
			6	7	8
48	White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>		✓	
49	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	
50	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓	✓
51	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		✓	
52	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>		✓	✓
53	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	
54	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓
55	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>		2	2
56	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		✓	✓
57	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓	✓
58	Common Redpoll	<i>Acanthis flammea</i>		1	
59	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>		5	2
60	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓
61	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		✓	✓

Other Taxa

1	Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>	4	4	
2	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>	1		6
3	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	1		
4	Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>		5	3
5	European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		3	
6	Viviparous Lizard	<i>Zootoca vivipara</i>			3