

# The Forest of Dean

Naturetrek Tour Report

22nd – 24th April 2022

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Tour report by Marcus John

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Tour Participants: Marcus John (Leader) with seven Naturetrek clients

## Summary

The Forest of Dean is an ancient royal hunting forest where areas of oak woodland are interspersed with more conventional coniferous plantations. The rich history of this area is reflected in the mosaic of habitats that have been preserved within its historic boundaries. We enjoyed excellent views of iconic breeding birds, including Redstart, Pied Flycatcher and Firecrest. Mammal sightings included three species of Deer, Red Fox and European Badger.

### Day 1

**Friday 22nd April**

We gathered before dinner in the historic Speech House Hotel, our base for this tour. Our leader, Marcus, 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, before heading out to look for nocturnal mammals. Although Wild Boar eluded us, we did see a total of seven Fallow Deer and a Red Fox.

### Day 2

**Saturday 23rd April**

We met in the hotel car park at 6am and were pleased to hear Greenfinches singing; this species is finally recovering after the impact of Trichomonosis. We paid a brief visit to Parkend, where a group of seven Jays flying over was a surprising sight and we saw a Muntjac Deer. We drove back to the hotel and went for a walk around Beechenhurst Enclosure. It was a dull, cool morning and bird activity was limited, though we enjoyed prolonged views of a Firecrest and heard the distinctive song of a distant Wood Warbler.

After a hearty breakfast, we visited the raptor watchpoint at New Fancy View, where we had great views of a displaying Sparrowhawk, watched a Chiffchaff in song and glimpsed an annoyingly elusive Blackcap! We continued to Cannop Ponds, where we heard a distinctive call from a small bird flying low over the water – a Common Sandpiper! It continued to fly up and down for the next 30 minutes, although it was reluctant to land. On our walk around the top pond, we had close and prolonged views of a pair of feeding Nuthatches in a waterside oak tree. On the water were stunning Mandarins, Tufted Ducks and two Little Grebes.

Next, it was on to Symond's Yat, a renowned raptor watchpoint that overlooks the river Wye. Another displaying Sparrowhawk was joined by local Buzzards. More surprising, two of the cavities in the high cliffs that are regularly used by Peregrines contained nesting Canada Geese! We also saw a female Goosander fly into another rocky crevice. Swallows were a welcome sight in such a late Spring.

After a light lunch at the Fountain Inn, we walked along the stream behind the pub and saw a pair of Grey Wagtails, but the Dippers were not showing. We drove on to Wenchford but lots of families out with their dogs made it difficult to find birds. However, as we returned along the stream, we found a very close Willow Tit, a species that has become increasingly rare in the Forest of Dean.

After an excellent dinner, we drove out at dusk to visit Keith's house in St Briavels, in the hope of seeing Badgers (we saw our only Roe Deer on the way). We enjoyed tea and cakes as we waited for the badgers to turn up. Just as we were about to give up, a big adult appeared under the lights in the back garden and remained on view for several minutes. Satisfied, we drove back to the hotel and were glad to get to our beds!

## Day 3

**Sunday 24th April**

We had hoped for a brighter morning and so it proved. Our walk before breakfast took us around a different part of Beechenhurst Enclosure and there was a lot more bird activity than the previous day. We finally caught up with a singing Blackcap, enjoying prolonged views through the scope. The scope also came in handy when we found a pair of Nuthatches flying in and out of their nest-hole. Walking back for breakfast, a few Crossbills flew over and we found a flock of Redpolls chattering as they fed on larch cones.

After breakfast, we went straight to Nagshead RSPB reserve. The sun filtered down through the trees as we walked down to the small pool by the lower hide. We scanned the small trees that line the pool and found not one, but two male Pied Flycatchers, soon joined by a female. As we watched them feeding, two male Redstarts joined them, affording excellent views as they also flew from tree to tree, feeding on insects. We stayed there for about half an hour; this was undoubtedly the highlight of the weekend! We walked the long trail around the reserve in warm sunshine; we saw two Treecreepers and better still, had good views of a singing male Firecrest.

After sandwiches for lunch, we headed back to New Fancy View, where we saw another Sparrowhawk, four more Buzzards and enjoyed watching the aerobatics of a pair of displaying Ravens. By mid-afternoon, after a lot of walking on a warm day, we decided to forego a visit to Crabtree Hill and so said our farewells at the hotel. It had been a thoroughly enjoyable weekend and we saw most of the special birds that make a spring visit to the Forest of Dean so rewarding. The group greatly enjoyed each other's company, and everyone vowed to return to this wonderful forest.

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## Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	April 2022		
			22	23	24
1	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		2	
2	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		8	5
3	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		4	
4	Mandarin Duck	<i>Aix galericulata</i>		8	
5	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓	✓
6	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>		4	
7	Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>		1	
8	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>		1	
9	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		2	
10	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		1	
11	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		2	1
12	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		2	4
13	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>		1	
14	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		✓	
15	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		✓	
16	Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>		✓	
17	Lesser black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		✓	✓
18	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		1	1
19	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓
20	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		H	
21	Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		H	
22	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		2	
23	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		9	9
24	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		✓	✓
25	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>		✓	✓
26	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓
27	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		1	2
28	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		H	H
29	Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montanus</i>		1	
30	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓
31	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓
32	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>			1
33	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		1	2
34	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		H	2
35	Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>		H	
36	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		3	1
37	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>			1
38	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>		1	1

			April 2022		
	Common name	Scientific name	22	23	24
39	Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>			3
40	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	H	3	1
41	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		2	2
42	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>			2
43	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓
44	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>			2
45	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		1	1
46	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓	✓
47	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>			2
48	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓
49	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>			1
50	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		2	
51	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrelli</i>	✓	2	1
52	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓
53	Eurasian Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓	2	
54	Lesser Redpoll	<i>Acanthis cabaret</i>			12
55	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>			5
56	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓
57	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>			1

## Mammals

		April 2022		
Common name	Scientific name	22	23	24
Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>	7	15	
Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>		1	
Muntjac Deer	<i>Muntiacus reevesi</i>		1	
European Badger	<i>Meles meles</i>		1	
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	1		
Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>		✓	✓