

The Forest of Dean

Naturetrek Tour Report

24th – 26th February 2023



Nuthatch



Treecreeper



Bullfinch



Mandarin

Tour report by Marcus John and images by Chris Goodfellow



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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 scarce resident birds, including Goshawk, Peregrine Falcon, Marsh Tit and Hawfinch. Night-time mammal sightings included Fallow Deer and Wild Boar.

Day 1

Friday 24th February

We met shortly before dinner in the historic Speech House Hotel, our base for this tour. Marcus gave us a brief introduction, outlining our itinerary and the target species that we might see at this time of year. We then enjoyed a superb three-course dinner, before driving out to look for nocturnal mammals. Although we had brief views of several Fallow Deer, there were sadly no Wild Boar to be seen.

Day 2

Saturday 25th February

We met in the hotel car park at 7am for our pre-breakfast walk. We were delighted to hear the song of Greenfinch; this species is finally recovering after the impact of Trichomoniasis. On the grassy clearing behind the hotel, a flock of about 30 Redwing was joined by several Mistle Thrush. Marcus talked us through the identification of Song and Mistle Thrush, as both species could be seen through the scope. We walked along a section of the Gloucestershire Way and found a good number of passerines feeding where a JCB digger had churned up the path. We really enjoyed getting such close views of commoner woodland birds, including three Nuthatches.

After a hearty breakfast, we made our way to Parkend, where we soon found a very obliging male Hawfinch sitting out in the open, at the top of a tall tree. Everyone had great views through scopes. Mid-morning, we headed over to New Fancy View, a raptor watchpoint on the historic site of one of the Forest's biggest coal mines. Although it was cold, a few Buzzards were displaying. We waited patiently until the sun eventually came out and soon after, a single Goshawk flew across, showing its white undertail coverts as it displayed low above the trees. A few minutes later, a pair of Goshawks flew higher and closer, affording excellent views.

We had lunch at the Fountain Inn, where we walked along the stream behind the pub. We had nice views of a male Grey Wagtail, though the Dippers evaded us.

In the afternoon, we walked out onto Crabtree Hill. This area of regenerating heathland is managed by the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust and offers a different range of birds to the rest of the Forest. It was a very cold afternoon and bird activity was limited but we did see a pair of Linnets and a big flock of Siskin. In addition, an encounter with the grazing Highland Cattle is always a pleasure! We walked back to the hotel via Woorgreens Lake, where a flock of Goosander included a very handsome drake.

After dinner, we decided to try our luck on a night-time walk from the hotel. Simon and Sian had a thermal imager, which proved to be invaluable. We found several Fallow Deer with Alan's spotlight, but we needed the thermal imager to see Wild Boar, one of which showed very clearly. A Red Fox was also added to our mammal list. Everyone enjoyed this very different way to see nocturnal wildlife.

Day 3

Sunday 26th February

We returned to Parkend before breakfast to look again for Hawfinches and had brief views of three birds as they flew out of the trees. We also made another visit to Parkend Church, where we saw a pair of Jays and heard a drumming Great Spotted Woodpecker, which Marcus was able to find through his scope.

We spent most of the morning walking around RSPB Nagshead, a wonderful oak woodland where we again had great views of commoner birds, including a very obliging Treecreeper. A Goshawk was seen briefly in flight and back at the car park, we clearly heard a singing Firecrest, but unfortunately it immediately flew off and was not heard again.

Next, it was on to Symond's Yat, a renowned raptor watchpoint that overlooks the river Wye. Given its elevated position, views of birds are often good and today was no exception. It was intriguing looking down on Goosander swimming in the river 150 metres below us and being at eye-level with a pair of Ravens, who repeatedly flew past in barrel-rolling display flights. After about 40 minutes, we were considering leaving when Sian spotted a Peregrine Falcon. It flew rapidly towards us and began calling loudly. The reason soon became clear; another male Peregrine was also in the air. The two birds continued to chase around right in front of us, twice clashing in mid-air. It was an amazing spectacle!

Our final destination was Cannop Ponds. The late afternoon light was wonderful, so we spent some time watching and photographing the Mandarin Ducks; we counted 34 on the upper pond alone. The last bird species we added to our list was Marsh Tit, which came to a bird table by the entrance road.

It was a thoroughly enjoyable weekend and we saw most of the special birds that make a winter visit to the Forest of Dean so rewarding. The group greatly enjoyed each other's company, and we had a lot of laughs! Most of us vowed to return one Spring to see the other birds that only visit the Forest during the breeding season.

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

Common name	Scientific name	February 2023		
		24	25	26
Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>			2
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		2	
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>			2
Mandarin Duck	<i>Aix galericulata</i>			48
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>			2
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>			10
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>			✓
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>			8
Common Merganser	<i>Mergus merganser</i>		7	2
Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>		✓	✓
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		2	
Common Wood-Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Collared-Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>			✓
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			✓
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			4
Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>			✓
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		✓	✓
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			1
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>			4
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		1	
Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>		3	
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		6	4
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	H		
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		H	2
Eurasian Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		1	1
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			2
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>			2
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>		✓	✓
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		✓	✓
Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		✓	✓
Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>			1
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>		H	H
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		✓	✓
Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>			H
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		2	2
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		6	4
Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		1	1
European Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		✓	✓
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		3	1
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		3	5

Common name	Scientific name	February 2023		
		24	25	26
Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>		30	6
Eurasian Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓	✓
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		1	1
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		1	
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		1	2
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓
Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>		1	3
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		1	
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		2	2
Eurasian Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>			2
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		100	H

Mammals

Common Name	Scientific name	February 2023		
		24	25	26
Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>	3	5	
Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>		2	
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>		1	
Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>	✓	✓	✓