

The Forest of Dean

Naturetrek Tour Report

1st – 3rd March 2024



Marsh Tit



Mandarin



Adder



Nuthatch

Tour report and photos by Marcus John



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Tour participants: Marcus John (leader) with 8 Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Friday 1st March

Speech House Hotel - Night drive

We met in the Toby Bar of the Speech House Hotel, where Marcus explained the itinerary for the weekend and the likely species that we might encounter. Then it was time for dinner in the historic Verderers' Room. The three-course meal was superb; everyone agreed that the food at this hotel is exceptional.

At 9:30pm we headed out on our night drive. We soon found a group of Fallow Deer quite close to the road, and we had good views of several more during the drive. The next mammal was a Wood Mouse, which those in the front saw scurry across the road. After about 30 minutes, we were driving near New Fancy View when a large Wild Boar suddenly emerged from the left-hand verge and trotted across the road. When we stopped, three more large boar followed, one at a time. One of the sounder was an adult female, and the others were likely her female offspring from previous years. We were all delighted to get a clear view of these exciting animals.

Day 2

Saturday 2nd March

Crabtree Hill - Cannop Ponds - Parkend Church - Parkend Yews - River Lyd

We woke early to find that it was snowing heavily. We were unable to get out in the vehicle, so we went for a walk along Spruce Drive and through the Arboretum before breakfast. Bird activity was limited but the snowy scenery was beautiful.

After breakfast we set off on a longer walk up to Crabtree Hill. The snow was still falling and there was virtually no wind as we walked along the Gloucestershire Way. We found a flock of tits and finches feeding on seed near a forest car park; several Wrens, Robins and Song Thrushes were singing. When we reached Crabtree Hill, there were very few birds to be seen until Marcus heard a flock of Crossbills; we were delighted when they flew into a nearby larch tree and remained feeding for about 10 minutes. We all had good views through the scope of both the brick red males and yellow/green females. Rather more incongruous was a Grey Heron, which flew up to perch at the top of a snow-covered pine tree! Our return route took us around the very muddy shores of Woorgreens Lake, so we were glad to get back to the warmth of the hotel for lunch.

The roads were much better by now, so after a light meal we drove to Parkend, via Cannop Ponds. At the upper pond, we had close views of the wonderful Mandarins, as well as a selection of other wintering wildfowl. At the feeder on the entrance road, we did not have to wait long for the resident Marsh Tits to put in an appearance. At the lower pond, we found a couple of Bramblings amongst the Chaffinches and Siskins.

In Parkend, we first visited both the Yews and the Church, but we did not find any Hawfinches. However, when we went for a walk along the River Lyd, we did see a smart Dipper, which sat out long enough for everyone to admire it through the scope - a great way to finish our first day!

Day 3

Sunday 3rd March

Parkend - Nagshead - New Fancy View - Cannop Ponds - Symonds Yat - Parkend

The day dawned bright and sunny, so we returned to the Parkend Yews before breakfast. We spread out to check the taller trees and look under the Yews; John soon found three Hawfinches perched very high in one of the tallest trees. Two flew out but one female remained; everyone was able to get good views through the scope.

After another wonderful cooked breakfast, we went for a walk around the short trail at Nagshead RSPB reserve. Although it was fairly quiet, we did enjoy good views of commoner woodland birds like Nuthatch, Treecreeper and Goldcrest. Next we visited New Fancy View, a well-known raptor watchpoint. We were very pleased to see three Goshawks; even though they were a long way off, we were able to identify their key features. Close by, we saw a female Adder, curled on a slope next to the path, basking in the sun - what a bonus! On the way back to the hotel, we stopped briefly at Cannop lower pond, where Jimmy saw a Water Vole; sadly, it swam off before anyone else could see it.

After another light lunch at the hotel, we drove out to Symond's Yat, where the views from Yat Rock were superb, especially in the bright sunshine. We scanned the cliffs and woodland for some minutes before Marcus found a Peregrine perched in a tall tree, but partially obscured. A few minutes later, we found its partner, which was clearing up one of the small caves in which they nest - a much better view! Brian found three Goosander on the river as well, and Jean saw a Kingfisher.

In the late afternoon, we had time to revisit Parkend, where John found another Hawfinch! We walked around to get a better angle and eventually everyone enjoyed excellent views. A superb way to finish off a memorable weekend in this ancient forest.

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only, P = Present)

Common name	Scientific name	March 2024		
		1	2	3
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		P	P
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		P	P
Mandarin Duck	<i>Aix galericulata</i>		19	8
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>		4	2
Common Merganser	<i>Mergus merganser</i>			3
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		P	P
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>		P	P
Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>		H	4
Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>		P	P
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		1	1
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		P	P
Eurasian Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		P	P
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		P	P
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		3	
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		P	
Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>			P
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		P	P
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		P	P
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		1	
Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>			3
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		1	3
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	H		
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		1	1
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			2
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>			2
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		1	2
Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>			P
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		P	P
Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		4	8
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		P	P
Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>		2	
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		P	P
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		P	P
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		4	
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		H	5
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		P	P
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		1	5
Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>			2
European Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>			P
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		6	4
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		2	2
Eurasian Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		P	P
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		P	P
White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>		1	

Common name	Scientific name	March 2024		
		1	2	3
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		P	
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		P	P
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		1	
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		P	P
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		P	P
Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>		1	2
Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>			4
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		3	1
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		10	9
Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>		5	
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		P	
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		2	2

Mammals

Common Name	Scientific name	March 2024		
		1	2	3
Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>	12	4	4
Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>	4		
Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>	P	P	P
Wood Mouse	<i>Apodemus sylvaticus</i>	1		
European Water Vole	<i>Arvicola amphibius</i>			1