

The Forest of Dean

Naturetrek Tour Report

6th – 8th March 2026



Hawfinch



Brambling



Dipper



Goosanders

Tour report by Arron Roberts



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour participants: Arron Roberts (leader) with seven Naturetrek clients

Summary

Covering forty-two square miles, the Forest of Dean is a large area comprising magnificent ancient Oaks, mixed broadleaf woodlands and stands of coniferous plantations, and provides a home to several speciality species. Despite the heavy fog all weekend, we managed to see many target species, including Hawfinch, Brambling and Goshawk. An enjoyable weekend was had by all, learning about the birds, mammals and local history of the Forest of Dean.

Day 1

Friday 6th March

Speech House Hotel – night drive

After an introductory talk and overview of the itinerary for the weekend, we enjoyed a lovely three-course meal in the Verderers Courtroom at the Speech House hotel. The hotel is full of features portraying the interesting history of the Forest of Dean. After dinner, we set out on our first night drive. Heading along quieter roads and old forestry tracks, we saw several Fallow Deer grazing on the road verges. After trying a few areas, we were rewarded with our target for this evening: Wild Boar. At this time of year, there are many piglets around, and we were fortunate to come across a small family rooting around on the side the road. At least four ‘humbugs’ were seen with the sow. We covered a few more promising areas, to no avail. Then, within three hundred metres of the hotel, we saw another group of piglets! There was a minimum of eight of them, all jostling for the best piece of turf to turn over. What a fantastic start to the weekend!

Day 2

Saturday 7th March

New Fancy View – Parkend – Wenchford – Woogreens Lake – Crabtree Hill – night drive

We started with an optional 7.00am pre-breakfast walk from the hotel. After a week of warm sunny weather, it was unfortunately back to foggy and overcast weather today. Nevertheless, we made the most of the early start in the woodland behind the hotel. Among the common woodland birds, we started to pick up some targets: Mistle Thrush, Redwing and Treecreeper, then fantastic views of a Firecrest, which was showing signs of spring, giving intermittent song and occasional displays of its fiery crest.

After breakfast, we headed for New Fancy View. Unfortunately, it was foggy and drizzling, and views from the top were limited, to say the least. After ten minutes with little activity from any birds, and not a lot of optimism, we decided to head to Parkend. Within minutes, we had had superb views of a male Hawfinch in the Yew trees, supported by several Greenfinches and Chaffinches. All the group were able to get good views, and could really see the impressive size and power of the Hawfinch.

We decided to go to Wenchford for Dipper, as the fog still hadn't lifted. A pleasant walk along the Blackpool brook provided us with good views of Grey Wagtail and our target bird too. A pair of Dippers were seen with nesting material, another good sign of spring to come.

Heading back to Parkend, we stopped at the church for twenty minutes before lunch. There were a further three Hawfinches around, and another target bird: Crossbill. Two females were feeding in the Larch trees surrounding the graveyard, and we were all able to have scope views of these special birds.

After a lunch break at the Fountain Inn, we had a quick walk behind the pub along the brook, where we managed to see a Marsh Tit, which was another new bird for many on the trip.

The final excursion for the afternoon was at Woorgreens Lake and Crabtree Hill. We took a stroll to the lake, which had several species, including a male Goosander, Mandarin Duck, Canada Goose and Lesser Black-backed Gulls. A pair of Stonechats welcomed us to the heathland, and we had scope views of the stunning male. A final highlight was a Redpoll feeding in the birch tree as we made our way back to the van.

After a well-earned rest and evening meal, we headed out for our second night time drive. We were fortunate enough to see another two groups of Wild Boar with stripy piglets, many Fallow Deer, and two new mammal species for the weekend: Reeve's Muntjac and Red Fox.

Day 3

Sunday 8th March

Cannop Ponds – New Fancy View – Symonds Yat

This morning, we ventured a little further from the hotel to a forest clearing, to see if we could add any new species. On the way, we had close views of two Firecrests by the arboretum, an encouraging sign that a pair may breed in the area. The fog was thick this morning, but we had three Roe Deers cross the path, and then spent the rest of the walk learning to identify birds by their song and calls.

After breakfast, we made a slight change to the itinerary, as the fog wasn't lifting. This morning, we headed to Cannop Ponds instead of Symonds Yat. At the stoneworks, we had close views of many woodland species with the help of some free seed offerings, enabling us to pick out key identification features. There were six Goosanders on the lake, along with several Mandarin Ducks in the wooded margins on the pond. The top pond produced several new birds, including Tufted Duck, Little Grebe and Coot. We had great views of Dipper below the dam, with a pair seen mating. A single Chiffchaff was heard singing, and another Marsh Tit appeared before we completed our loop of the pond. Scanning the Chaffinches at another feeding site, we spotted a beautiful male Brambling, which was a real highlight for several of the group.

Next, we stopped off at New Fancy View once more, in hope that the fog had lifted. Unfortunately, it was even worse than the day before, and the forecast had got in wrong once again. Not being able to see beyond the first line of trees, we had a stroll around the viewpoint and located a flock of Bullfinches, a beautiful male brightening the dreary day.

After lunch back at the Speech House Hotel, we visited Symonds Yat rock. The fog still hung overhead but we were lucky and had a view of the river below. A Peregrine was perched next to the cliff face: they claim territory for the breeding season ahead early in the year. The heronry was filling up, with several birds sitting on their nests. Despite the weather, birds were still active and getting ready for spring.

All of a sudden, a stunning Goshawk flew by, close to the viewpoint! It was carrying a decent-sized prey item as it continued into the woodland opposite, and dived out of sight to find a place to enjoy its meal. What a superb sighting for the group, and a fantastic end to our trip!

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Species lists

Birds (H=heard only)

I=introduced	Common name	Scientific name	March 2026		
			6	7	8
	Canada Goose - I	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		✓	✓
	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>			✓
	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>			✓
	Mandarin Duck - I	<i>Aix galericulata</i>		✓	✓
	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓	✓
	Common Merganser	<i>Mergus merganser</i>		✓	✓
	Common Pheasant - I	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>			✓
	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		✓	✓
	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		✓	✓
	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>			✓
	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>			✓
	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			✓
	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			✓
	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>		✓	✓
	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		✓	
	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			✓
	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>			✓
	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		✓	
	Eurasian Goshawk	<i>Astur gentilis</i>			✓
	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓	
	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>			✓
	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			✓
	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		✓	
	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		✓	✓
	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>			✓
	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		✓	✓
	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>			✓
	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>		✓	✓
	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>		✓	✓
	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓
	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓
	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		✓	✓
	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		H	H
	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>		✓	✓
	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		✓	✓
	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		✓	✓
	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		✓	✓
	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		✓	✓
	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		✓	✓
	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		✓	✓
	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>		✓	✓
	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓
	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓	✓
	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓	
	White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>		✓	✓
	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓
	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓	✓

I=introduced		March 2026		
Common name	Scientific name	6	7	8
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		✓	✓
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓
Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>			✓
Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>			✓
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		✓	✓
Redpoll	<i>Acanthis flammea</i>		✓	
Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>		✓	
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>			✓

Mammals

I=introduced		March 2026		
Common name	Scientific name	6	7	8
Eastern Grey Squirrel - I	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>		✓	✓
Reeves's Muntjac - I	<i>Muntiacus reevesi</i>		✓	
Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>	✓		
Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>			✓
Wild Boar - I	<i>Sus scrofa</i>	✓	✓	
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>		✓	