

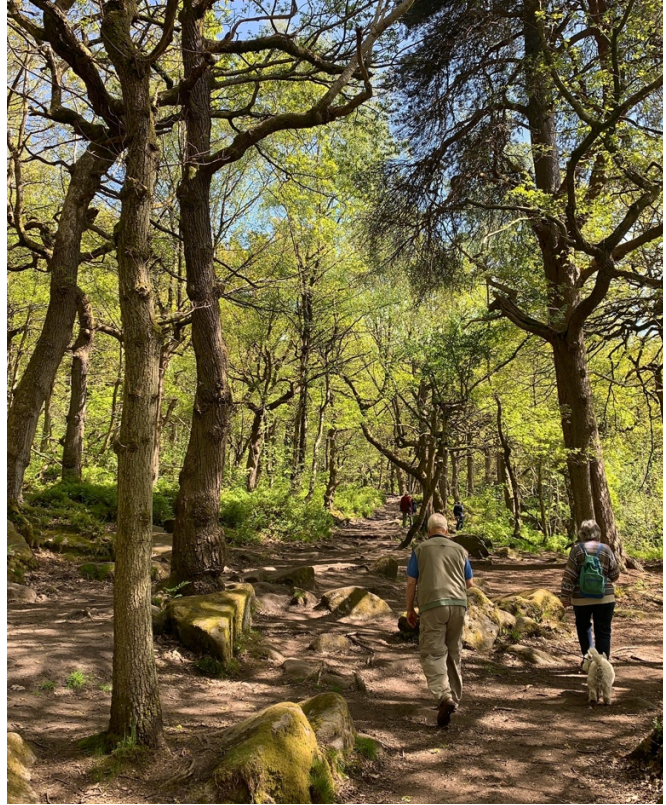
The Peak District in Spring

Naturetrek Tour Report

18th – 21st May 2023



Green-winged Orchid



Padley Wood



Green Hairstreak



Red Grouse

Tour report and images by Matthew Capper



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Tour participants: Matthew Capper (leader) with seven Naturetrek Clients

Summary

A superb spring break in the Peak District saw us enjoying over 100 species of bird over the course of a long weekend, along with some superb landscapes and a decent dollop of history and heritage thrown in too. We enjoyed some of the iconic Peak District locations such as the Gritstone Edges and Upper Derwent Valley and headed a little further afield to the Dearne Valley, home of a chain of superb RSPB reserves. We managed to see pretty much all our hoped-for species, with the exception of Mountain Hare which evaded us this time. The variety of habitats ensured we saw moorland specialities such as Ring Ouzel, Whinchat and Red Grouse, wetland birds such as Marsh Harrier and Avocet and woodland species including both Redstart and Pied Flycatcher.

Day One

Thursday 18th May

Leadmill Bridge to Harper Lees, Hathersage – Upper Midhope Area

We met up at our hotel for 2pm and with introductions and a short briefing out of the way, headed out for an hour or so to stretch our legs after the, in some cases, long journeys to get here.

Our destination was on the edge of Hathersage, a lovely spot where we could follow the river and get our first target species – Dipper. There were two families of Mandarin on the water and both Pied and Grey Wagtail along the bank. Summer migrants such as Willow Warbler, Chiffchaff and Blackcap were singing and there were a good number of Orange Tip butterflies, especially where there was abundant Cuckoo Flower.

The Dippers did us proud with multiple sightings and at least two recently fledged birds were being fed by their parents. A great sighting and the number one target achieved for Janet within an hour on day one!

Once we returned to the hotel, we were able to check in and unpack before assembling again for an early dinner so that we could fit in an evening excursion. Our destination was the moorland fringe further north on the top edge of the National Park, starting with a superb spot for waders. The bubbling call of Curlews and the peewits of Lapwings greeted us, and Snipe were sat in the open on a couple of fence posts. Oystercatchers added to the spectacle and Red Grouse were cackling away further back. It was incredibly atmospheric, and we stood, enjoying the sounds of a moorland in spring. Things got even better when we added the fluffy chicks of both Curlew and Lapwing and topped that with a young downy Tawny Owl that had 'branched out' and we got in the scope for everyone.

Other birds of note included Siskin, Linnet, Stock Dove and Mistle Thrush but despite a thorough scan, we weren't able to find a Mountain Hare and a distant Merlin was only seen by Matthew.

We drove a mile or so back down the road and stopped at our second viewing spot - another moorland fringe but this time on the edge of a mixed woodland. A Cuckoo greeted us and there were lots of Red

Grouse here. A nice male Stonechat perched up long enough for everyone to get a view in the telescope and then after a little wait, we had the first of several excellent views of roding Woodcock, accompanied by a very close Noctule Bat. One of the best birds of the evening was sadly a little distant but it was still a Long-eared Owl! And then the final act of an excellent first day was churring Nightjar, accompanied by views of two birds over the adjacent moor.

Day Two

Friday 19th May

Cutthroat Bridge to Winstone Lee Tor – Wyming Brook – Upper Derwent Valley

Our day started with a visit to the bakery in Hathersage to pick up a sandwich for later and then we were off up the road to Cutthroat Bridge for a morning's walk across the heather moorland. We soon picked up our first good birds with a male Whinchat on a fence post and a pair of Ring Ouzel that we all managed to get onto with a bit of patience. Curlew were flying around, a Snipe was 'chipping' nearby and we saw a distant Wheatear on the adjacent ridge.

Sadly it had started to rain as we set off on the walk and it was now quite heavy. We were damp but not deterred and as we walked on, we added another Ring Ouzel, several Stonechat and a family of Red Grouse – mum, dad and several brown fluffy chicks – close to us, just off the path. The rain thankfully eased to a stop although we failed to spot a much hoped for Mountain Hare, despite persistent scanning. Up at Winstone Lee Tor we had superb views over the Peak District and found another Ring Ouzel. However, the views were nothing compared to the scope filling sighting we had of one on the way back! A few days earlier had seen the 80th anniversary of the wartime Dambusters raid so we chatted about this and the links to the Valley and shared some of the wider history with a couple of Dutch cyclists who were on holiday and exploring the area.

As we wandered back towards the vehicle, another Red Grouse family was worth a close look and then as we neared the end of the walk, we picked up the Whinchat from earlier and got everyone a good view. After a toilet stop and a picnic lunch, we headed into the woodland at Wyming Brook. Our target here was Wood Warbler and whilst we didn't see it overly well, we were all able to appreciate the beautiful spinning coin song, interspersed with the plaintive pueew pueew pueew call. Coal Tit and Siskin were calling but the star of the show was a tiny Goldcrest, singing right above our heads.

We finished the day in the Upper Derwent Valley, visiting Birchinlee and the site of the village that housed the Navvies that built the dams. The Valley at this time of year is stunning and the beech woodland that has grown in place of the buildings was at its best. We drove up to the very end of the road and watched a couple of Common Sandpiper picking their way along the shore of Howden Reservoir.

Day Three

Saturday 20th May

Stanage Edge (pre breakfast) - The Dearne Valley

Four of the group assembled before breakfast for an early excursion up to Stanage Edge. A clear night had left a chilly start with mist rolling in across the hills, but it soon began to burn off and it was clear that today would be a beautiful late spring day.

The small area of woodland at Hollin Bank was alive with bird song – Song Thrushes sang against each other, Cuckoo and Curlew were calling from the moors, Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff were all singing away. A nearby Pied Flycatcher could not be located though. We took a wander up towards the edge and picked up a Roe Deer with a very small fawn and also a Brown Hare. Our best bird of the walk was a stunning male Redstart that we got in the scope as it sang from the top of a tree, and we took one more opportunity to look at the fawn suckling from the mother Roe Deer before driving back down the hill to Hathersage and breakfast.

Old Moor is one of the RSPB's flagship nature reserves and we spent the morning birding here. A Barn Owl, sat outside one of the owl boxes, was a great start along with a range of wildfowl and other wetland birds. The rarest bird of the trip was a Ring-necked Duck on Wath Ings, a species that should have been over in the US, not Yorkshire! We talked through the conservation success story that surrounds the Bitterns on site but could not find any sign of one today, despite there being four males present this year. Instead, our second Roe Deer of the day ran through the meadow, where we were able to access a private part of the reserve to look at Green-winged, Northern and Southern Marsh Orchids, accompanied by several Dingy Skipper butterflies.

We had a leisurely lunch at the café and a bit of retail therapy before heading to Adwick Washland. This recently created site was looking superb in the Spring sunshine, especially as the Hawthorn blossom was at its peak. We enjoyed a pleasant afternoon taking a circular route through the reserve and back along the riverbank. There were a few warblers singing along the Trans-Pennine trail and our only Bullfinch of the weekend was in the hedgerow as we entered the reserve. Sedge Warblers were singing from the ditches, and we got a very good view of one in the scope as it sang from the top of a hawthorn. Waders included plenty of Avocet and Lapwings – both with chicks, although it was a little surprising how long it took us to get a Redshank. Other highlights included a wonderful view of a Brown Hare that was just the other side of the fence, a superb fly past from a marauding Hobby and a rather demented Little Egret that was running around after fish only metres away from us. Soon it was time to head back though, and we added Whitethroat to the growing bird list as we walked back to the minibus.

Our day was not quite complete though as we stopped in at a nearby site in the hope of ending the day with a pair of Black-necked Grebes that had taken up residence. Sadly, they proved to be too elusive, having chosen to nest out of sight but we enjoyed more waterbirds and had a great view of a Fox as it wandered along the inside of a hedgerow to the right of the hide. And that was it for the day; time to enjoy the views as we drove back across the moors to Hathersage and a well-deserved dinner and drink.

Day Four

Sunday 21st May

Padley Gorge – Hathersage – Eastern Moors Estate

Our final day was another stunner weather wise with very few clouds and wall to wall sunshine. After breakfast we drove the short distance up and out of the village to Surprise View where we parked up and headed across Lawrence Field to Padley Gorge. Despite being early, the day was already warm enough for Green Hairstreak butterflies to be on the wing and we saw several including a very co-operative one that posed for photographs.

On the moorland fringe there were several birds of note. A pair of Kestrel included a male with prey (from a distance, it looked like it was probably a rat), a Tree Pipit was singing and displaying from two nearby birch trees and a calling male Cuckoo kept coming gradually closer until we were able to obtain superb views in the scope and appreciate the yellow eye ring. At one point, it dropped down into the heather and came back with a large caterpillar that was probably an Emperor Moth.

Once into the woodland, our focus switched to Pied Flycatchers and it didn't take long before we could hear a couple of birds singing. Dropping into the wood from the top allowed us to be at eye level with the canopy and this paid off as we got point blank views of a singing male right next to us. One of the most sought-after birds of the trip showing incredibly well for everyone. We had a couple more encounters with the flycatchers as we dropped down further and began our climb back up the gorge. There were a few other woodland birds about including Nuthatch and we had brief views of another Dipper. Best of all though, was a singing Redstart that we got the scope on for the whole group. Views like this are a real privilege and we left the woodland delighted with what we had seen.

A slow stroll back up to the car park brought us a couple more Green Hairstreaks and a dead Minotaur Beetle which we were able to study closely. We drove back via Stanage Edge and stunning views of the Hope Valley before allowing everyone a nice relaxed lunch in Hathersage and some downtime. Two of the group needed to get off at this point so we said our farewells and then headed to the Eastern Moors estate, adding several parties of Red Deer before stopping at a spot that Matthew knew where Lesser Redpoll visit a feeder put out by the local ringing group. Over the course of the next half hour, we got good views of several birds. Often partially obscured but enough to appreciate the red on the head and the overall diminutive stature of these characterful birds. Here, we also got several Reed Bunting, Siskin, lots of Goldfinch and our only Yellowhammer of the trip.

After a short drive, we reached our final stop of the trip and spent a bit of time checking the feeding area in the car park. A ranger from the Eastern Moors team was present and told us that feeders were largely being discouraged as it was unmanaged and had led to poor hygiene for the birds. There were still a few bits about though with displaying Siskin and close singing Blackcap and Chiffchaff. The ranger was known to Matthew, and he asked her to give the group a quick talk on the work she does to rescue and rehabilitate injured and orphaned Swifts. The group were amazed by her levels of dedication and sheer stamina, and we all agreed she was a definite Swift hero!

We walked a nearby area of grassy moorland in the hope of finding an Adder but had no joy. Instead, we saw about a dozen Common Lizards and enjoyed the song of Tree Pipit, Siskin, Lesser Redpoll and Willow Warbler for one last time.

And that was just about it. A leisurely drive back to Hathersage and the George hotel where we said our final goodbyes and wished everyone a safe journey home. It had been a superb few days with great scenery, mostly great weather, superb wildlife and excellent company. Everything a Naturetrek trip should be.

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

Common name	Scientific name	May 2023			
		18	19	20	21
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>			✓	
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Greater Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>			✓	
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>			✓	
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>			✓	
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		3		
Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>			✓	
Ring Necked Duck	<i>Aythya collaris</i>			1	
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>			✓	
Mandarin Duck	<i>Aix galericulata</i>	✓			
Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Red Grouse	<i>Lagopus lagopus scotica</i>	✓	✓	✓	
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			✓	
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>			✓	
Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			✓	
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>			✓	
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>			✓	✓
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>		1		
Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>			2	
Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>			2	
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	1		1	1
Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>				2
Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>			1	
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	1			
Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>			✓	
Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			✓	
Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	2	2	✓	
Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>			✓	
Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>	2+	2		
Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	✓	✓		
Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>		2		
Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>			2	
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>			✓	
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>			✓	
Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>			✓	
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>			✓	
Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	✓		✓	
Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	h	h	h	✓
Long-eared Owl	<i>Asio otus</i>	1			
Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>			1	

Common name	Scientific name	May 2023			
		18	19	20	21
Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	1			
Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>	2+			
Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>			1	
Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		✓		✓
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>		✓	✓	
Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		✓	✓	
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>				✓
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	✓	✓		✓
Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓		✓	✓
Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>	✓			1
Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓	✓	
Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>			1	2+
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>		2		
Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	
Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		1		
Ring Ouzel	<i>Turdus torquatus</i>		4		
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>			✓	
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>			✓	
Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>			✓	
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>			✓	✓
Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>			✓	
Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>		2+		
Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		✓		
Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>			h	ca.5
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	✓		✓	✓
Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Coal Tit	<i>Pariparus ater</i>		✓		
Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>				✓
Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	✓			
Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓		✓
Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>			✓	
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓	✓
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>			✓	
Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓

Common name	Scientific name	May 2023			
		18	19	20	21
Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓	✓	
Lesser Redpoll	<i>Acanthis cabaret</i>				✓
Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>			✓	
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>				✓
Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>			✓	✓

Other wildlife

		May 2023			
Common name	Scientific name	18	19	20	21
Mammals					
Grey Squirrel	Sciurus carolinensis	✓	✓	✓	✓
Noctule Bat	Nyctalus noctula	1			
Rabbit	Oryctolagus cuniculus	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Hare	Lepus europaeus	1		1	
Red Fox	Vulpes vulpes			1	
Red Deer	Cervus elaphus				30+
Roe Deer	Capreolus capreolus			3	
Butterflies:					
Orange Tip	Anthocharis cardamines	✓	✓	✓	✓
Green Hairstreak	Callophrys rubi				✓
Peacock	Aglais io			✓	
Brimstone	Gonepteryx rhamni			✓	
Speckled Wood	Pararge aegeria			✓	
Large White	Pieris brassicae		✓	✓	✓
Small White	Pieris rapae			✓	
Dingy Skipper	Erynnis tages			✓	
Holly Blue	Celastrina argiolus			✓	
Dragonflies & Damselflies					
Common Blue Damselfly	Enallagma cyathigerum			✓	
Blue Tailed Damselfly	Ischnura elegans			✓	
Small Red Damselfly	Ceriagrion tenellum			✓	
Four-spotted Chaser	Libellula quadrimaculata			✓	
Hairy Dragonfly	Brachytron pratense			✓	
Selected Other Species					
Green Tiger Beetle	Cicindela campestris	✓			
Alder Leaf Beetle	Agelastica alni			✓	
Minotaur Beetle	Typhaeus typhoeus				✓
Smooth Newt	Lissotriton vulgaris			✓	
Green-winged Orchid	Anacamptis morio			✓	
Northern Marsh Orchid	Dactylorhiza purpurella			✓	
Southern Marsh Orchid	Dactylorhiza praetermissa			✓	