

The Forest of Dean in Spring

Naturetrek Tour Report

28th – 30th May 2021



Grey Wagtail (Oliver Smart)



Dipper (Oliver Smart)



Willow Warbler (Oliver Smart)



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Tour participants – Oliver Smart (Leader) with six Naturetrek clients

Introduction

The Forest of Dean comes alive in the spring with migrants arriving from Africa and the trees blossom and come into leaf. More visitors arrive too, to enjoy the sights, sounds and activities on offer. Nature is a predominant feature for many and the trails, forests, rivers and ponds produce an array of species as the warmer months continue. Covering an area of 110 square kilometres the Forest of Dean is, in places, ancient, dating back thousands of years. Today, along with mixed forest and coniferous plantations for commercial enterprises the deciduous oak woodlands are some of the best remnants in the country.

Day 1

Friday 28th May

We met together for dinner in the Verderer's Courtroom at our hotel, tucking into some delicious meals and discussed the prospects for wildlife over the next two days. Oliver gave background details on the locations and wildlife that we hoped to target over the weekend, focussing on some of the key spring migrants and summer specialities.

After dinner we quickly changed and headed out for an evening walk, taking in the milder conditions that we've finally been experiencing. The timing was perfect and within a short time on nearby heathland we witnessed three Nightjars flying overhead, coming within just a few metres, the males showing off their white wing flashes and tail feather spots. At least one Woodcock repeatedly flew above us, completing laps of the clearing, calling as it went.

Following these two special target birds we headed to the woodland edge where Oliver tried out a new bat detector gadget and soon recorded Common and then Soprano Pipistrelle bats, displaying the spectrograms on his iPhone! A Tawny Owl hooted in the distance as we began our return leg in a loop. Here we caught glimpses of Wild Boar, before being presented with excellent views of two young animals foraging in the grass. A check of some damper pools and surrounding habitat also delighted the group with Great Crested Newt and Common Toad sightings, adding to our excellent tally for the evening.

Day 2

Saturday 29th May

We had a respectable 06:30 start before breakfast and a walk along trails close to the hotel. The weather was overcast with some drops of rain, but the conditions were good for wildlife watching. Along the road Common Redstart sang and briefly showed, whilst a flock of Common Crossbill flew overhead. Siskin perched for all to see and the regular chants of Blackbird, Song Thrush and others kept us entertained. A Willow Warbler posed nicely, singing its descending song and a treat followed with a male Wood Warbler allowing everyone a chance to listen to its distinctive call. The species has been harder to find this year so it was a nice surprise to find one in the forest.

We completed a circular walk through the arboretum where we encountered Trecreeper, Bullfinch and Goldfinch before returning to the hotel for a hearty breakfast, setting ourselves up for the day ahead.

We decided to head to Nagshead, which never disappoints, particularly with Blackcap and Garden Warbler starting things off close to the visitor centre, which was finally open today. Pied Flycatcher has become more elusive and trickier to observe at this time of the breeding season, but one called for a short while and showed momentarily. Common Redstart in particular were confiding along with a pair of Mistle Thrush observed building a nest with beaks full of moss high in an oak tree. Close to the car park a Bank Vole posed motionless for the group along with a Common Lizard basking in the diffused bright light, our first of two spotted on the RSPB reserve. Bank Voles are very common around the forest and are busy foraging both during the day and at night. They are reasonably short-lived, perhaps just two years, which is perhaps not surprising with the number of predators about!

We dropped into Parkend for lunch and enjoyed the antics of a pair of Grey Wagtail bounding up and down the stream, before half the group saw a juvenile Dipper land only a few metres from our picnic table. As the rest of the group had failed to see them, even after a few passes, we went for a wander downstream where we encountered a young, ringed bird which bathed and dipped and practiced feeding in shallow water; a great behaviour to observe. Perhaps the highlight though was that of a ruckus close by, with a number of different alarm calls. Initially it was thought a raptor was in the area but then Oliver spotted a Jay carrying a Nuthatch in its beak. It was being mobbed by Coal & Great Tit, Blackbird and another Nuthatch. The noise and mobbing behaviour were extraordinary to watch. The Jay landed and plucked the bird before leaving a pile of feathers after being chased off by the marauding flock. We inspected the feathers and collected a few that were scattered on the ground.

With a forecast of sunshine for Sunday (and the chance of more invertebrates), we decided to visit Symond's Yat during the afternoon instead. A short ride from Parkend brought us to the busy car park. On the walk up towards the viewpoint a noisy Great Spotted Woodpecker chick attracted our attention, however the adults seemed reluctant to bring in food, even though it was 40 feet up a tree. A Peregrine Falcon at the viewpoint though was fantastic, riding the thermals and circling from the cliffs up into the sky. It was also great to be able to look down on Buzzards cruising along the treetops below, an unusual but effective perspective.

Returning to Speech House Hotel, we freshened up before another excellent meal with plenty of anecdotes and travel stories along with topical current affairs. Following dinner several of the group fancied another evening outing, so we ventured to Cannop Ponds and Woorgreens in search of more nocturnal wildlife. Apart from the usual assortment of waterfowl we encountered our third bat species, a Noctule flying high above the water. It continued for some 15 minutes before disappearing, just when several others were spotted close to the water's surface. These turned out to be both the pipistrelle species. On our way for our final stop at Woorgreens a Tawny Owl was spotted perched on the side of the road, taking off as we approached. At the lake more bats were encountered before a brief Tawny Owl chick was heard as we returned to the vehicle. Another super day exploring the forest.

Day 3

Sunday 30th May

We started at 06:30 once again, hoping for as much luck as Saturday, heading off this morning in search of Hawfinch. It's a tricky time of year for observing this species and Parkend failed to produce any. We did locate

another Great Spotted Woodpecker nest however, and many Mistle Thrush flew between the Lime trees, one chasing away a Sparrowhawk with its loud rattle-like call!

After another hearty breakfast we dropped into New Fancy View and despite the absence of any reptiles on a gloriously sunny morning, we did watch a Goshawk completing a full pass from Cinderford towards Coleford! The bird was very distinctive and a good comparison to the Buzzard and Raven that were also in the area, as well as the earlier Sparrowhawk.

Taking a short drive to Cinderford we walked into the forest to look for butterflies, our top priority for the morning. We were thrilled with a good assortment of quality species including over a dozen Wood White, Grizzled & Dingy Skipper and mating Green-veined White. We also chanced upon a freshly emerged female Broad-bodied Chaser which stunned many in the group and Oliver explained the details of exuviae, which we found in abundance around the pool. Large Red and Azure Damselfly were also present in small numbers. It was also a good time to check some of the flowers and illustrate the different food plants of the butterflies we were seeing.

We returned to Speech House Hotel for a light lunch before completing our afternoon at Crabtree Hill. More chasers were located including a couple of pastel-blue males along with a few Two-banded Longhorn Beetles. Whilst enjoying the warm sun we continued following trails to the heathland and added Tree Pipit, Stonechat, beautiful displaying Linnet, Whitethroat, Willow Warbler and a surprise male Common Redstart. Small pools were teeming with life with newts, tadpoles, Pond Skaters, Whirligig beetles, Water Boatman and plenty more; if only we had a net and a bucket! After scoring our final new butterfly species, a Small Heath, we made our way back through a cleared plantation. A Firecrest ended the day singing and briefly showing - a top bird, topping off a fabulous tour.

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Species List

Birds (✓ = recorded but not counted; + = approximate count; h = heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	May 2021		
			28	29	30
1	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓	✓
2	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓		✓
3	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		✓	
4	Mandarin Duck	<i>Aix galericulata</i>		✓	
5	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓	
6	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>		✓	H
7	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		H	
8	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>			✓
9	Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>			✓
10	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓	✓
11	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		✓	
12	Eurasian Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>	✓		
13	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>		✓	
14	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		✓	✓
15	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		✓	H
16	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		✓	✓
17	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	H	✓	
18	European Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>	3		
19	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>		✓	✓
20	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		✓	✓
21	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		✓	✓
22	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		✓	✓
23	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>			✓
24	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>		✓	✓
25	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		✓	✓
26	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>			✓
27	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		✓	✓
28	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓
29	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓
30	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓
31	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓	✓
32	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		H	
33	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	H	✓	✓
34	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		H	H
35	Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>		H	
36	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	H	✓	✓
37	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>		✓	✓
38	Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis</i>			✓

	Common name	Scientific name	May 2021		
			28	29	30
39	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>		H	✓
40	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	H	✓	✓
41	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		✓	✓
42	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		✓	✓
43	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		✓	
44	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		✓	✓
45	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	H	✓	✓
46	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓	✓
47	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	H	✓	✓
48	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>		✓	
49	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓	✓
50	European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>		✓	
51	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>		✓	✓
52	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	H		✓
53	White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>		✓	
54	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	✓
55	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓	✓
56	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓
57	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>		✓	✓
58	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	H		✓
59	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	H	✓	✓
60	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		✓	
61	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		✓	✓
62	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>			✓
63	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>		7	
64	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓
65	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		✓	✓

Other species

	Common name	Scientific name	May 2021		
			28	29	30
	MAMMALS				
1	Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>	✓	✓	
2	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>	2		
3	Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>		✓	✓
4	European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>		✓	
5	Bank Vole	<i>Myodes glareolus</i>		1	
6	Common Pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i>	2	6+	
7	Soprano Pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus pygmaeus</i>	1	2+	
8	Common Noctule	<i>Nyctalus noctula</i>		1	

	REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS				
1	Common Lizard	<i>Zootoca vivipara</i>		2	
2	Great Crested Newt	<i>Triturus cristatus</i>	6		3
3	Common Toad	<i>Bufo bufo</i>	3		
	BUTTERFLIES				
1	Wood White	<i>Leptidea sinapis</i>			✓
2	Grizzled Skipper	<i>Pyrgus malvae</i>			✓
3	Dingy Skipper	<i>Erynnis tages</i>			✓
4	Green-veined White	<i>Pieris napi</i>			✓
5	Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>			✓
6	Large White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>			✓
7	Peacock	<i>Aglais io</i>			✓
8	Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>			✓
	OTHER INVERTEBRATES				
1	Green Carpet Moth	<i>Colostygia pectinataria</i>	✓		
2	Broad-bodied Chaser	<i>Libellula depressa</i>			✓
3	Large Red Damselfly	<i>Pyrrhosoma nymphula</i>			✓
4	Azure Damselfly	<i>Coenagrion puella</i>			✓
5	Two-banded Longhorn Beetle	<i>Rhagium bifasciatum</i>			✓
6	Dor Beetle	<i>Geotrupes stercorarius</i>		✓	✓