

# Pamber & Silchester (Day Trip)

Naturetrek Tour Report

30th July – 7th August 2020

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European Stonechat



Common Dodder



Golden-ringed Dragonfly



Purple Hairstreak

Report & images compiled by Martin Pitt.



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Martin Pitt (Leader), plus 34 Naturetrek clients over seven day trips.



## Summary

Naturetrek's day trips took us through a range of Heath and Woodland across this interesting area on the southern edge of the Thames Basin. The oak dominated woodland was the focal point, however we took in a mix of habitats that have been influenced by human activity over more than two millennia, the length of history becomes obvious with the remains of the Roman town of Calleva Atrebatum.

Overall, we recorded 60 species of bird, 22 species of Butterflies and thirteen species of Dragonflies. Certainly, the very dry weather impacted both the numbers and diversity of the species seen and some were obviously coming to the end of their flying seasons, as demonstrated by some distinctly tatty butterflies. However, every day had its highlights, from Stonechats 'chacking' on the heath, often being joined by our resident pair of Dartford Warblers, to the good numbers of the dramatic Hawkers that would check us out and fly circles around us. In the forest, the good numbers of Spotted Flycatchers were an indication of the welcome upturn in fortune for this declining species. We also found a range of interesting plants from the parasitic Dodder, to the folk remedy rich species of Sneezewort and Fleabane.

## Thursday 30th July (Day Trip)

We started by crossing the heath. We were immediately met by quartering Brown Hawkers and Blue Emperor. A still singing Willow Warbler was a surprise, but the two Red Kite that drifted over were to be expected these days in the north of Hampshire. We watched a family of stonechats, but despite waiting there was no sign of the local Dartford Warblers.

We wandered through the woodland to a small stream. Here the local Golden-ringed Dragonflies were joined by a Migrant Hawker, but it was a male Beautiful Demoiselle that performed for the cameras. Above us, we tracked a family group of Spotted Flycatchers and more surprisingly a family part of Siskins arrived in the same Birch tree. We walked the rides of this ancient woodland. In the Oaks, Purple Hairstreaks were active in the sunshine but none would drop from the trees. Flowering plants were at a premium, but upon the remaining blooms we found three species of Skipper and the majestic Silver-washed Fritillary.

After lunch we moved to an area of coniferous woodland, however it was the lily fringed pond here that grabbed our attention. Brilliant Emerald and Red-eyed Damselflies were added to our growing Dragonfly list. A doe Roe Deer crossed our path as we returned to the cars for a short transfer to our last stop of the day.

The Roman walls of Calleva are a surprise for those who had not previously visited the area, and we spent a few minutes admiring the amphitheatre. The mercury had risen and with the heat, general activity had dropped, so after an introduction to the history of the area we wrapped up the day and went in search of ice-creams or other refreshment.

## Friday 31st July (Day Trip)

We started by crossing the heath. The sky was cloudless and already this early it was clear it was going to be a scorcher. Brown Hawkers patrolled their patches of heath and we were soon watching a family of Stonechats. Before we left the heath, we looked at a patch of Dodder, a plant species that parasitizes Heather and Gorse and was in full flower.

We headed into the wood, and picked up a mixed party of birds. A pair of Marsh Tits were of interest. At the small stream, a couple of Golden-ringed Dragonflies were patrolling and battling for supremacy. A male Beautiful Demoiselle was also holding court. Although we could hear the Spotted Flycatchers, they wouldn't show in the crowns of the stream side trees.

We walked the rides of this ancient woodland. In the Oaks, Purple Hairstreaks were keeping in the shade and high in the canopy due to the high temperatures, but we found a few Silver-washed Fritillaries and a mix of other butterflies. The rides had a shortage of nectaring plants due to the recent high temperatures, but we found the evocatively named Sneezewort and Fleabane. At our lunch spot, we watched the antics of Cinnabar moth caterpillars on the ragwort.

After lunch we moved to an area of coniferous woodland. Upon arrival, we were surprised to find a Purple Hairstreak in the path in front of us and after photographs were taken, we headed to the comparative shade of the lily fringed pond. Unfortunately, some locals were cooling off, meaning the dragonflies were distant but Red-eyed Damselflies were just about visible.

A short drive, during which the thermometer in the car showed it was now 34°C, we arrived at the Roman walls of Calleva. We sucked in the atmosphere of the Roman amphitheatre, and enjoyed watching a family of Spotted Flycatchers along the fence line. The view from the walls showed the whole of the enclosed area, the only Roman town in the UK not to have subsequently been built on. After an introduction to the history of the area we wrapped up the day and went in search of ice-creams.

## Monday 3rd August

We hadn't got started when a Crossbill flew over and Brown Hawkers started zipping past, but soon we headed over the heath to be met by the family of Stonechats. The much sought-after Dartford warbler also started call and we followed it as it dived from one Gorse bush to another. Before leaving the heath, we stopped to inspect the patch of flowering Dodder. Before we left the heath, we looked at a patch of Dodder, a plant species that is parasitizes Heather and Gorse and relies on those plant for support, that lead to plenty of speculation on the etymology of doddery.

We headed into the wood, and soon found family groups of Treecreeper, Goldcrest and Spotted Flycatcher. A Marsh Tit held our attention before we moved down to the small stream. Unfortunately, dragonflies seem to be scarce today but we admired the male Beautiful Demoiselle, however the biggest surprise were a couple of locally rare Honey Buzzards drifting over the canopy, drawing the ire of the resident Buzzard. We walked on through this ancient woodland, spotting Purple Hairstreaks high in the oaks and finding both Sneezewort and Fleabane.

After lunch me moved to an area of coniferous woodland and a water lily fringed pond. A Mandarin duck was on the pond, and Red-eyed Damselflies zipped over the lily pads. We found a Migrant Hawker a little further on to add to our burgeoning dragonfly list.

We finished off the day at Calleva, only a short drive away and wandered around the amphitheatre and the city walls that were at a major cross roads 1500 years ago, but definitely a quiet backwater today.



## Tuesday 4th August (Day Trip)

Our early crossing of the heath soon brought success with a male Dartford Warbler showing itself in the same view as a Stonechat and Common Whitethroat. We stopped for the now obligatory introduction to Dodder and its hosts of gorse and heather before entering the forest. Immediately our attention was drawn to a strange buzzing that turned out to be a mating pair of Red-legged Shieldbugs in an oak tree. A few metres further on we found a family party of Spotted Flycatchers, the adults still feeding the young high in the canopy.

Down in the sunny glade by the stream, the male Beautiful Demoiselle posed, but we had virtually given up when first a Golden-ringed dragonfly turned up and then we spotted a Common Darter. As we left, a showy Southern Hawker flew around us for several minutes, but unfortunately refused to settle for the waiting cameras. We continued on through the ancient woodland finding Silver-washed Fritillaries and Ringlets still hanging on despite the recent hot weather.

Our walk after lunch through the coniferous woodland seemed very quiet. We were joined by a family of Goldcrest and then a Firecrest called, but remained hidden. A Migrant Hawker zipped around us and we found a late Comma on the remaining nectar bearing plants. All too quickly, a doe Roe Deer appeared along the ride and slipped back into the forest.

We still had enough time to visit Calleva and sat on the walls imagining what life would have been like 1500 years ago when this tranquil rural scene would have been a bustling city.

## Wednesday 5th August (Day Trip)

The heath again came up trumps with both a pair of Stonechat and Dartford Warblers showing to the group, there were even a few snatches of song from the male Dartford showing that he was going to hold territory for a while longer. Again, we stopped at the Dodder, and although some flowers were now fading, a new clump showed this fascinating plant off at its best.

The wander into the wood was quiet, although a Marsh Tit was a good find. We then headed to the sunny glade by the stream. Here a Southern Hawker, was joined by a Migrant and Brown Hawker, but it was the Beautiful Demoiselles that posed for the cameras. We walked through the oak woodland, and although there were a good number of butterflies, they all looked distinctly tatty as the end of their season approached.

At lunch we were visited by Red Kite and Sparrowhawk and then we headed for an area of coniferous woodland. Although the forest was quiet a Southern Hawker posed for the cameras and then a late Golden-ringed Dragonfly allowed close approach. The pond still had a bit of activity and we watched a pair of Kingfishers catching fish and there were a few Red-eyed Damselflies on the Lily pads.

Our last stop of the day was the Roman town of Calleva and we watched a family of Spotted Flycatchers feeding young whilst stood in the ancient Amphitheatre. After a short walk on the town walls we returned to the cars for our journeys home.

## Thursday 6th August (Day Trip)

The day started overcast and drizzly, however in crossing the heath we soon found ourselves trying to manoeuvre to get a good view of a pair of Dartford warblers. In thinking we had lost our chance, we concentrated on the local Dodder plants, just for the male to perch up in full view on top of a gorse bush, and stay there for several minutes.

Dropping into the woods everything was quiet. We stopped to admire a Birch Polypore bracket fungus that showed three specimens of different ages. We stopped by the stream but apart from a male Beautiful Demoiselle and jewel like Alder Leaf Beetles, the weather was against us. We headed for the main section of Pamber Forest and at last the temperature picked up and the sun started to come out. Walking the rides, we soon started to find both butterflies and dragonflies. Purple Hairstreaks were seen but elusive, and the Silver-washed Fritillaries were tatty, but the large hawk dragonflies, both Southern and Migrant gave close views as they checked us out. A Golden ringed Dragonfly also gave good views at our feet, as we stood on the bridge over his stream.

After lunch we headed to a area of coniferous woodland, but it was the pond that was our primary focus. Here Brown Hawkers sped backwards and forwards, often challenging the larger Blue Emperor for priority. On the lily pads, Red-eyed Damselflies sallied forth. Our last stop of the day was the Roman town of Calleva and to complete our tour, we sat on the top of the walls overlooking the 4km of roman ramparts watching a family of Spotted Flycatchers.

## Wednesday 29th July (Day Trip)

The day started hot and sunny and only promised to get hotter through the morning. The heath was quiet and promised to get quieter still as the mercury climbed. The male Stonechat was still standing sentinel and a Brown Hawker criss-crossed the heather searching for flying insects. At least the flowering Dodder was still on show.

Dropping into the woods everything was if anything even quieter. We soon found that all the birds were high in the canopy and even so we soon connected with a noisy Marsh Tit. Down at the stream, a copy of Beautiful Demoiselles were holding territory and we could compare the brilliant blue males with the more subdued bronzy females. A couple of Golden-ringed Dragonflies patrolled the stream and clashed at the boundaries of their territory and a mating pair of Common Darters started ova-positing in the slow-moving water.

Heading deeper into Pamber Forest, we found that the rides were relatively quiet and the nectaring plants were wilting in the heat. However, butterflies were supercharged by the temperatures but we managed to pick out Silver-washed Fritillaries and Small Skippers. A family of Spotted Flycatcher were sallying for insects from a dead snag, and a bit later we found another family of the same species that is obviously doing well in this part of Hampshire.

With the temperature hitting 35oC, some of the group decided to forgo the afternoon. It was only the hardy few that set out for the dragonfly pond, but here we found Blue Emperor, Brown Hawker and Red-eyed Damselflies. The best was to come with a couple of fly-bys by a lone Lesser Emperor. We stopped on the way back to the cars to photograph a showy Purple Hairstreak that for once had descended from the treetops and then with no respite from the scorching temperatures called it a day and went in search of ice-creams.

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	Common name	Scientific name	Trips	July		August				
				30	31	3	4	5	6	7
	<b>Birds</b>									
1	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓				B			
2	Mandarin	<i>Aix galericulata</i>	✓			B	B	B	B	
3	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓		B	B	B	B	B	
4	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	C						
5	Red-legged Partridge	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>	✓				C			
6	European Honey-Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>	✓			A				
7	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	✓				A	A		
8	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓	A	A	A	A,B,C	A	A	A
9	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	B	A	A	A	A,B	B	
10	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	B	B,C	B	B	B	B	B
11	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	B		B	B			
12	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓			A,B	B		A	
13	Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓					A		
14	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	A,B,C	A,B,C	A,B,C	A,B,C	A,B,C	A,B,C	A,B
15	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	✓	A	A	A			A,B	A
16	Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓		A					
17	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	✓			A		B		
18	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓	A,B	A,B	A	B		A	A
19	Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	✓	A,B	A	A	A	A	A,B,C	A
20	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓		A					
21	Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>							A	
22	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	A	A	A	A	A,C	A	A
23	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓	A,B	A	A	A	A,B	A	A
24	Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓		A,C	C			C	A
25	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	A	C	B,C	B,C	A,B,C	A	A
26	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓			B,C			C	
27	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	✓	B	B	A,B	A,B		A,B	
28	Marsh Tit	<i>Parus palustris</i>	✓	A	A	A	A	A		A
29	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	A,C	A,B	A,B	A,B	A,B,C	A,B	A
30	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	A,B	A,B,C	A	A	A,C	A,B	A,B
31	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	✓	B	A	A	A,B	A,B	A,C	A,B
32	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	✓			A	A,B		A	A,B
33	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	A	A,B	A,B	A,B	A,B	A	A
34	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓					C		
35	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	A,B	B	A			B	
36	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	✓		A		A,C	A		

	Common name	Scientific name	Trips	July		August				
				30	31	3	4	5	6	7
	<b>Birds</b>									
37	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	A,C	A	A,B	A		A,C	A, B
38	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	✓	A,B	A	A	A		A,B	A
39	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓		A		A		A	A
40	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	✓				A			
41	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>	✓			A	A	A	A	
42	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	✓	A,B	B	A,B	B	A	B	B
43	Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapillus</i>					B			
44	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓			C		C		
45	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	B,C	A,C	A,C	A	A,C	A,B, C	A
46	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	✓		B	B		B	C	A
47	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	A	A,C	A			A	A
48	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	A,B	A,B, C	A,B, C	A,B, C	B,C	B,C	A, B
49	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	✓	A,B	A,C	A	A	C	C	A
50	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	A		A	A	A	A	A
51	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓				A	C		A
52	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	✓	A			A			
53	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓		A					
54	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	A	C	A		C		
55	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	✓	A		A	A	A	A	A
56	Common Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	✓			A	A			
57	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓	C	C		A	A		
58	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	A	A,C		A	A	A	A
59	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	A	A,C	A,C	A	C	A	
60	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	✓	A	A		A	A		A

	<b>Mammals</b>									
1	Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	✓	B		B	B			A
2	Muntjac	<i>Muntiacus reevesi</i>	✓	A						
3	Brown Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>	✓					C		
4	European Rabbit	<i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>	✓			C	C	C	C	
5	Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>	✓	A	A	A	A	A	A	A

	<b>Odonata</b>									
1	Beautiful Demoiselle	<i>Calopteryx virgo</i>	✓	A,B	A	A	A,B	A	A	A
2	Azure Damselfly	<i>Coenagrion puella</i>	✓							B
3	Red-eyed Damselfly	<i>Erythromma najas</i>	✓	B	B	B		B	B	B
4	Blue-tailed Damselfly	<i>Ischnura elegans</i>	✓	B	B					
5	Migrant Hawker	<i>Aesthna mixta</i>	✓	A	A	B,C	A,B	A,B	A,B,C	B

	<b>Odonata</b>										
6	Southern Hawker	<i>Aesthna cyanea</i>	✓					A	A,B	A	
7	Brown Hawker	<i>Aesthna grandis</i>	✓	A,B	A		A,B		A,B	B	A,B
8	Blue Emperor	<i>Anax imperator</i>	✓	A	B		A			A,B,C	A,B
9	Lesser Emperor	<i>Anax parthenope</i>	✓								B
10	Golden-ringed Dragonfly	<i>Cordulegaster boltonii</i>	✓	A	A			A	B	A	A
11	Brilliant Emerald	<i>Somatochlora metallica</i>	✓	B							
12	Keeled Skimmer	<i>Orthetrum coerulescens</i>	✓				A				
13	Common Darter	<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>	✓	B				A	A,B	B	A

	<b>Butterflies</b>										
1	Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>	✓	A,C	A,C		A	A,C	A,B	A,B	A
2	Small White	<i>Artogeia rapae</i>	✓	A	A,B		B	A,B	A,B	A,B,C	A,B
3	Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias crocea</i>	✓				A				
4	Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>	✓	A	A		A		A	B	A
5	Purple Hairstreak	<i>Quercusia quercus</i>	✓	A	A,B,C		A			A	A,B
6	Small Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>	✓	A	A			A			
7	Holly Blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>	✓	A,B,C	A,B,C		B,C	A,C	C	A,B,C	A,B
8	Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>	✓	A						B	
9	Peacock	<i>Inachis io</i>	✓	A	A,B		A,C		A	A	
10	Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	✓	C	A		A,B	C		A,B,C	A
11	Comma	<i>Polygonia c-album</i>	✓					B	B		
12	Silver-washed Fritillary	<i>Argynnis paphia</i>	✓	A	A,B		B	A		A	A
13	Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>	✓		A,C		A,B	A	A	A	A
14	Ringlet	<i>Aphantopus hyperantus</i>	✓	A	A		A,B	A	A	A	
15	Gatekeeper	<i>Pyronia tithonus</i>	✓	A,B,C	A,B,C		A,B,C	A,B,C	A,B,C	A,B,C	A,B
16	Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>	✓					A		A	A
17	Speckled Wood	<i>Parage aegeria</i>	✓	A,B	A		A,B	A,B	A,B	A,B	A,B
18	Essex Skipper	<i>Thymelicus lineola</i>	✓	A							
19	Small Skipper	<i>Thymelicus sylvestris</i>	✓	A	A						A
20	Large Skipper	<i>Ochlodes venatus</i>	✓	A	A		B		B	B	B