

# The New Forest

Naturetrek Trip Itinerary

2012

## Dates

Friday 18th May - Sunday 20th May 2012

## Cost

£295

## Single room supplement

£55

## Grading

A. Easy day walks

## Focus

General natural history

## Tour leader

Jon Stokes



Dartford Warbler



Acres Down

Images by Paul Stanbury & Jon Stokes



Naturetrek Cheriton Mill Cheriton Alresford Hampshire SO24 0NG England

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

F: +44 (0)1962 736426

E: [info@naturetrek.co.uk](mailto:info@naturetrek.co.uk)

W: [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk)

**NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.**

## Introduction

The New Forest is one of the most important ecological areas in Britain, its value having recently been officially recognised by its designation as Britain's newest National Park. It comprises a vast area of rolling heathland, mixed forest and damp boggy hollows, covering some 144 square miles of south-west Hampshire and south-east Dorset. 'The Forest', as it is known locally, is still managed under a pastoral system, incorporating ancient grazing rights and periodic controlled burnings of the heathland. Indeed, it is this age old form of management that has both created and conserved the New Forest's unique ecological richness and diversity.

Over the past 150 years Britain has lost almost 80% of its lowland heathland and today the New Forest holds the largest and most important area remaining in the country. As a result it contains a huge variety of rare species of plants and animals. Amongst the insects, dragonflies, moths and butterflies are particularly well represented whilst five of the six British reptiles occur here, including the rare Smooth Snake and Sand Lizard. Roe, Fallow, Red and Sika Deer all graze the woodland edges and in terms of birds, the New Forest holds an unparalleled range of scarce breeders. These include over half of the total British population of Dartford Warblers (around 500 pairs), plus Woodlarks, Wood Warbler, Crossbills, Nightjars and raptors such as Hobby, Goshawk and Honey Buzzard. There is also a rich variety of plants, especially in the damper areas of heathland.

## Day 1

Friday

We will meet at our hotel for an evening meal and subsequent drinks in the bar, providing the chance to get to know everyone. For those who wish to venture out we will take a short drive and then walk out over the surrounding heathland in search of singing Nightjars and roding (displaying) Woodcocks. Dusk is also a good time of the day to see the New Forest's bumper population of Fallow Deer which venture out of the woodlands to feed.

## Day 2

Saturday

Following yesterday's late night we will take a leisurely breakfast before driving the short distance to Acres Down, a high ridge of open heathland overlooking the mass of woodland that extends south-west across the New Forest. On the way we will make a quick stop at Bolderwood, an area of dense, mixed forest and ornamental woodland that supports a small, and often highly elusive, breeding population of the tiny Firecrest. This is a rare breeding species for which the Forest has become renowned; indeed Bolderwood is the site where the species was proved breeding for the first time ever in Britain (during the 1960s).

Acres Down itself holds all the characteristic New Forest woodland species, but our attention here should be overhead for this site has long been renowned as the best vantage point in the New Forest from which to see birds of prey. By sitting and looking over the vast expanse of forest around us we have a good chance of seeing Hobby, Sparrowhawk and Buzzard as they hunt above the tree tops. We may even be lucky enough to see a

Honey Buzzard, one of the New Forest's rarest breeding birds. Honey Buzzards are late migrants, but have usually arrived by mid-May and at this time of year they often engage in their dramatic aerial displays. Raptor activity reaches a peak at around mid-morning in hot, calm conditions so we will hope for ideal weather conditions for our visit here. After lunch in a nearby pub, we will drive to the northern portion of the forest and take a walk in an area known as Holly Hatch. Here we will look for woodland birds such as Redstart, Wood Warbler, Lesser-spotted Woodpecker and perhaps Hawfinch. If time permits, we may venture down to Beaulieu Road Station late in the afternoon to look for Hobbys. These graceful falcons often hunt dragonflies over the bogs and are best seen late afternoon and early evening.

## Day 3

## Sunday

We will make an early morning start today to get to Islands Thorn Enclosure for around 6.30am. This is a large tract of broad-leaved woodland, near Fritham village on the north side of the Forest and holds a good variety of breeding warblers and other birds. The early morning sounds should range from the occasional hoot of a Tawny Owl to the silvery tones of singing Wood Warblers. There are also good numbers of Redstarts and other more common woodland species, as well as the more elusive Hawfinches and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers. Eyeworth Pond, which is situated at a site where gunpowder was produced, sometimes plays host to the attractive Mandarin Duck which breed ferally in the vicinity. The open heath nearby has such typical heathland species as Tree Pipit, Woodlark and Stonechat, as well as Dartford Warblers.

Returning to the hotel for breakfast, we will leave an hour or so later and drive the short distance to Beaulieu Road. The Bishop's Dyke/Beaulieu Heath complex supports the widest possible variety of New Forest habitats, including wet acidic bog with willow carr, dry heath, woodland borders with grazed forest lawn and broad-leaved woodland. As such, this is one of the prime areas for many of the region's rare and localised species such as Dartford Warbler and Woodlark. Hobbys are a regular sight overhead hawking for dragonflies and other insects and in the heather there is a chance of finding an Adder or a Common Lizard; we would have to be extremely fortunate, however, to locate either a Smooth Snake or Sand Lizard, two nationally endangered species that do occur here. Nearby Denny Wood holds good numbers of woodland birds, including breeding Siskins and Redpolls, all three woodpeckers, Wood Warbler, Redstart, Hawfinch and many more. The damp, boggy areas around the woodland edge also support a rich plant and insect life.

We will take a quick lunch at another local pub before deciding how to spend our remaining few hours. The exact itinerary will be fairly flexible and dependent on what species we have seen and those we have missed. There are additional sites to explore for Dartford Warbler and other areas that hold both Hobby and Woodlark. Around mid-afternoon we will depart for home.

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## Clothing and equipment:

Binoculars are essential. Bring a telescope if you have one, since it will be useful for the raptor-watching session. Since it can be muddy underfoot we would suggest you bring walking boots, and wellingtons may be useful if the weather looks wet.

## Grading:

There will be no serious walking, with easy walks on gentle terrain.

## Food

Breakfasts and dinners are included in the cost. Pub lunches and drinks are not included.

## How to book your place

In order to book a place on this holiday, you will need to read our main Naturetrek brochure and complete and return the enclosed booking form together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost. If you do not have a copy of this brochure, please call us now on 01962 733051. You are also welcome to book online at [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk) or call us with your credit card details.

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