

The Forest of Dean

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1 Arrive Speech House Hotel

Day 2/3 Exploring the Forest of Dean

Departs

February/March/June

Focus

Birds & other wildlife

Grading

A (easy). All walking will be at a slow birdwatching pace over mostly flat ground.

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code (GBR47) or brochure

Highlights

- Enjoy the varied birdlife of The Forest of Dean
- Woodland birds and raptors
- Hawfinch, Brambling & Crossbill possible
- Displaying Goshawks and the chance of Wild Boar
- An evening excursion for Nightjar in May
- Excellent food & a superb location at our hotel



Hawfinch



Wild Boar



Crossbill



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Introduction

The Forest of Dean is an area of mixed forest covering an area in excess of 100 square kilometers. This ancient forest is one of the last remaining in the UK and plays host to a whole wealth of exciting bird species. Over this short break we will spend time out on foot covering different trails and visiting various sites with the focus of finding these birds whilst taking in whatever other wildlife we may come across. From our comfortable hotel base in the heart of the forest, we will make daily walks exploring the surrounding trails during the day, and one evening there will be the option to head out in search of Wild Boar.

Itinerary

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.

Day 1

Arrive Forest of Dean

Your tour leader(s) will meet you at the Speech House hotel at 6pm. Before dinner, you will have a short introductory chat outlining the programme for the next couple of days and some of the birds we will hope to see. There may be an optional excursion after dinner and a short presentation about the area.

Days 2 – 3

Exploring the Forest of Dean

We will deliberately keep a flexible programme in order to make best use of the weather conditions and to maximise our chances of seeing key species. Our tour leaders know the area extremely well, and will make decisions on the day as to exactly where we will go. Some of the habitats we are likely to visit along with the birds hoped for across the two seasons are described below.

Whilst out walking the trails we will be passing areas of deciduous woodland and in particular will pay close attention to stands of Beech and Hornbeam. These can be good for finches, particularly in the winter months when large flocks can be encountered. We will spend time around these superb “food” trees and hope to watch Brambling and Hawfinch in amongst Chaffinch and Greenfinch. Where we encounter stands of larch and pine we will search for roving flocks of Crossbill which favour these coniferous species. During the May tour there is still a chance of Hawfinch, as they breed in the forest, but winter sees our population boosted by migrants which often gather in small flocks giving us a greater chance. The same applies for Crossbill.



There are a few accessible lakes around the forest and we will visit the best spots, which often hold wintering Mandarin Duck and also Goosander whilst the alders that often line these areas are popular with Redpoll and Siskin. Again the finches are easier in March as they will still be in flocks. Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers do breed in the forest and in March, in particular, we shall keep a keen ear out for them as they will be laying claim to their territories with both drumming and calling. They are possible on both tours but a sighting would be a real bonus!

Goshawk breed here in good numbers and they are certainly possible on both tours but the March tour holds the best chance as they will be displaying over their territories.



By the time of our May tour, breeding will be in full flow and a whole host of migrant birds return here to breed. The forest has an excellent population of Pied and Spotted Flycatcher and Redstart are numerous. Wood Warblers give their distinctive cascading song and these species will all be targets as we enjoy not just watching but listening and learning the songs as the birds will be in full voice. Nightjars will have returned to

the open glades by our May tour and as we wait and hope for a glimpse one evening, Woodcock can often be seen displaying.

On both tours we will hope to find Wild Boar and whilst this can be very unpredictable and often difficult there will be an option for a night drive to increase our chances on both tours. We have not missed this species yet!

In summary both the selected tour dates, in late winter and late spring, hold a wide range of exciting species and whilst enjoying everything we happen to come across, we shall aim to see the species that really make the Forest of Dean a very special place.

After dinner on Day 2 there may again be an opportunity to head out in the hope of encountering Wild Boar or to listen for Nightjars (May/June tour)

On our final day (Day 3) we will finish birding in the late afternoon and the tour will end back at the hotel in the early evening being back at the hotel around 5 - 5.30. We will not be travelling far from the hotel so should anyone like to leave earlier on the final day then this would be possible.

Tour Grading

A (easy). There will be some easy walking on this holiday, covering between 3 and 5 miles per day. This will be at a slow birdwatching pace, on mostly flat ground.

Weather & Clothing

Temperatures will of course vary between February/March and May/June but it is always advisable to take layers and prepare for cold or warm weather. Waterproof clothing and sturdy – preferably waterproof or water-resistant – footwear is recommended in case of showers, as we could get caught in rain away from shelter.

You should bring warm clothing in case we make dawn or evening bird/boar watching excursions, and for the evenings (May/June) mosquito repellent is advisable.



Great Grey Shrike

Food & Accommodation included in the price

Breakfasts and evening meals are included in the holiday cost beginning with the evening meal on Day 1 and finishing with breakfast on Day 3. Accommodation will be at the Speech House Hotel in twin, double or single rooms, all en suite with tea/coffee making facilities and hairdryers. The rooms we are allocated are in the courtyard of the hotel, just outside the main building. These rooms are simple but perfectly clean and comfortable. It is possible to upgrade your room to one in the main building for an additional £15 per person per night, subject to availability. Please request any room upgrades at the time of or prior to booking.

The tour price includes a 3-course meal on both nights and the food is a combination of modern and traditional British cooking and, where possible, uses locally sourced seasonal ingredients.

Vegetarian options are available and there are 3 options to choose from for each course.



Pied Flycatcher

Lunches are not included in the cost of this tour. We will stop at a pub for lunch and, depending on weather and other factors, we may make another comfort stop during the day. Snacks, drinks and items of a personal nature are not included in the price of the tour, so you will need to make sure you have what you need during each day's programme.

Directions to the Speech House Hotel

Your hotel: The Speech House Hotel

Coleford,
Gloucestershire,
GL16 7EL
Tel: 01594 823658

Directions by car:

If you have a Sat Nav please put in the Postcode above (GL16 7EL) and the directions below are a guide and to help with the map reading.

From the North:

On the M5 southbound leave the M5 at junction 8 onto the M50. Follow the M50 until it merges into the A449/A40. Follow the A40 until bearing off towards Goodrich and then follow the A4234 for around 6 miles to the crossroad with the B4226. Turn left here and follow this road for a short time with the Speech House Hotel on your right.

From the South:

On the M5 northbound leave at junction 15 onto the M4 and continue onto the M48 and the Severn Bridge. Over the bridge, leave the M48 at junction 2 towards Chepstow and from here take the A48 to Lydney and the B4234 to Whitecroft and then on to Parkend. When in Parkend, continue on the B4234 (Cannop Rd) until a crossroads with the B4226. At the crossroads turn right and shortly you will see the Speech House Hotel on your right.

From the London area:

Join the M4 and follow this towards Bristol. Leave at J21 to the M48 and over the Severn Bridge. Followed by the directions above.

Directions by public transport:

By train:

The best train links are into Lydney train station and this is a 15 minute drive from the hotel. Taxis do need to be booked in advance as there is not a taxi rank at the station. Two companies are: Abbey Taxis: 01594 528181 and K & T Taxis: 01594 845913.



By bus:

There is a bus service from Gloucester which stops outside the Speech House Hotel. It is the number 30 service that runs from Bay J from the main bus station and you will need to get off at the Cannop, Speech House stop.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests, at the time of booking.

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