

The Forest of Dean

Naturetrek Tour Report

6 – 8 March 2015



Hawfinch by Andrew Keeble



Hawfinch by Greg Mabbett



Great Grey Shrike by Tom Mabbett



Mandarin Duck by Andrew Keeble

Report compiled by Greg Mabbett
Images by Andrew Keeble, Greg & Tom Mabbett



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Summary

We spent a very enjoyable weekend exploring the Forest of Dean, packed with great birds and wildlife, and lots of fun. Every site we visited brought excellent sightings of a range of species. Highlights included superb views of Great Grey Shrike, Hawfinch, hundreds of Lesser Redpolls, Goshawk, and a tantalising encounter with a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker on our final walk. We also had a superb night drive with exciting Wild Boar encounters.

Day 1

Friday 6th March

Tom and Greg met the group at 6pm at the Speech House Hotel and after a delicious meal and an outline of what was to come over the weekend, we enjoyed a short talk and learned about the history of this fascinating place.

Day 2

Saturday 7th March

Those who were keen for an early start met at 7am and we went for a woodland walk from the hotel. We enjoyed the morning bird song and had interesting sightings including Two Hawfinches that flew over, Nuthatches were everywhere, Song Thrushes were vocal and there was a busy flock of Siskin in some larches. After a productive hour we headed back to the hotel with large numbers of Redwing passing overhead, and finding two Mistle Thrushes in a field.

After a hearty breakfast we drove a very short distance and set out on a walk to Crabtree Hill. We enjoyed watching a pair of Bullfinches on the path, and on reaching the open glade a herd of Fallow Deer crossed not too far ahead of us. Before long we were enjoying stunning views of wintering Great Grey Shrike with the bird

showing just a few metres away! We watched it stoop towards a pair of Stonechat and also saw it hovering in search of its next meal: a top bird and great to see a lot of different behaviour.

On our return to the vehicles we noticed a Goosander flying towards Woorgreens Lake so we made a diversion for a quick stop here. We all enjoyed seven Goosander as they finally appeared from behind the island along with a Little Grebe. Lots of Frogs were showing signs of spring.

After a quick comfort stop back at the hotel and with conditions looking good we headed to New Fancy viewpoint. From there we enjoyed stunning views and watched some acrobatics from the Buzzards. We then drove to Parkend for lunch.

Following lunch and watching Treecreeper and Grey Wagtail behind the pub, we walked up to the village green with the weather turning lovely and warm. A Hawfinch dropped into the Yew trees to feed but again it proved very tricky to get a good view of it!

Next we went for a walk at Brierley and enjoyed a bird-filled afternoon in glorious conditions. The larches were full of Chaffinches (one appearing very large compared to the nearby Redpoll) and a few smart Bramblings were picked out amongst them. Continuing on, a raptor was spotted high above us and on closer inspection it was a Goshawk. It was drifting near a Buzzard providing a good size comparison as it showed its distinctive tail, wing shape and flight style. Excellent!

Continuing on we heard and then briefly saw another Hawfinch so we all gathered and kept very quiet as we listened and hoped for more. After some patience and effort we were rewarded as a bird flew in calling and circling above us before landing on top of a spruce in perfect light. This bird stayed long enough for everyone to really take in all its plumage features and we were all delighted with superb views - what a bird! After the bird finally moved into the woods and with everyone on a high, we slowly made our way back to the vehicles and enjoyed the evening sun. We saw some more Fallow Deer before returning to Speech House Hotel.

After another delicious meal, those that wanted to went on a night drive with one main target in mind - Wild Boar. There are signs of these animals all around the forest and we now hoped to see them. With spotlights readied we headed out. Remarkably, on the very first corner we had a Fox in our lights and just moments later we spotted a single large Boar not too far into the woods. It froze in the lights and we all had great views before it trundled off - what a start! As we slowly continued, a Tawny Owl flew over the vehicle. Touring around some more roads we couldn't find any more Boar so we returned to our original route and it worked well as we found a sounder of around ten animals. They were feeding on what looked to be sugar beet and we had great views. We had spent a great hour covering the forest by night before heading back delighted!

Day 3

Sunday 8th March

There was another good turnout for the pre-breakfast walk and we headed for a log on which we had put seed the evening before. Around 150 Redwing were covering the field next to the hotel and Stock Dove, Chaffinch and Nuthatch were coming to the seed. With Great Spotted Woodpeckers drumming and Siskin displaying, we enjoyed covering a new area before heading back for breakfast.

The weather wasn't looking too good but we headed out a short distance to Staple Edge glade. The weather wasn't putting off the birds as the calls of Crossbill were instantly heard as we got out of the vehicles, and as we walked a short way all we could hear was the chattering and flight calls of at least 100-150 Redpoll. They were everywhere! Crossbills were flying over quite regularly and a nice male landed enabling us to get the scope on it. With the weather getting a little worse we slowly headed for the vehicles, getting more excellent closer views of Crossbill - great birds.

We now headed to Cannop Ponds and enjoyed watching the Mandarin Ducks and a close up Raven. We put out some seed and enjoyed close up views of the more common woodland birds.

Next we headed to Symonds Yat where we spent some time watching and scanning from the viewpoint where a pair of Peregrines were showing. A Grey Heron was in a tree top and soon after hearing Hawfinch flight calls, a flock of around 15 birds flew past giving the rare opportunity to look down on them. It was a spectacular view with the River Wye below, and after soaking up the Peregrines we made our way to a pub for lunch.

After lunch we went for a short walk alongside the River Lydd where we saw three more Hawfinch (flying just as the scope was being trained on them), and a few walking ahead saw a Kingfisher, and Goldcrest displaying at eye level.

With the weather improving we ended the weekend with a walk at the RSPB Nags Head reserve. This ancient woodland was stunning in the afternoon sun and we walked quietly keeping alert for any activity. A Great Spotted Woodpecker was picked up and on scanning for that a Hawfinch was spotted in an Oak tree, and then a stunning female Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was found. It was busily feeding in the very tops of the oaks a little way off the track. We all tried to get views of this sought after and notoriously tricky species and though some managed to glimpse it, the bird never settled for prolonged views and we eventually lost it. Whilst looking for it a herd of Fallow Deer with an impressive buck sporting a slight limp were feeding below us.

With time moving on we headed back to the vehicles and returned to the hotel. We all said our farewells, and for those who wanted to there was the opportunity to go over our checklist once more. It had been a very productive couple of days exploring the Forest of Dean and we had been lucky enough to encounter many of its star species. Good birding and good fun!

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Species Lists

Birds (✓ = recorded but not counted)

	Common name	Scientific name	March	
			7	8
1	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	✓	✓
2	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓
3	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓
4	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓	✓
5	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	□
6	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓	□
7	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓
8	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	✓	✓
9	Mandarin Duck	<i>Aix galericulata</i>	□	✓
10	Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>	✓	□
11	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	✓	□
12	Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	✓	□
13	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓
14	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	□
15	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	□	✓
16	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	□	✓
17	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓
18	Common Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓
19	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	✓	□
20	Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓
21	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	□
22	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia 'feral'</i>	✓	□
23	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	✓	✓
24	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓
25	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	□	✓
26	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	✓	✓
27	Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	□	✓
28	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓	✓
29	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>	□	✓
30	Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	✓	✓
31	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrelli</i>	✓	✓
32	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	✓	✓
33	Northern Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓
34	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓
35	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	□
36	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	✓	✓
37	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓
38	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓
39	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	✓	✓
40	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓
41	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	✓	✓
42	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	✓	✓
43	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>	✓	□
44	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>	✓	✓
45	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓
46	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓
47	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	✓	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	March	
			7	8
48	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	✓	✓
49	Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>	✓	
50	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓	✓
51	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓
52	Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	✓	✓
53	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓
54	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓
55	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	☐	✓
56	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓
57	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓
58	Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>	✓	☐
59	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓	✓
60	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓
61	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>	✓	✓
62	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	☐
63	Lesser Redpoll	<i>Carduelis cabaret</i>	✓	✓
64	Common Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	✓	✓
65	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothrustes</i>	✓	✓
66	Common Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	☐	✓

Other Taxa

1	Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>	✓	✓
2	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>	✓	
3	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	✓	
4	Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>	✓	✓
5	Common Frog	<i>Rana temporaria</i>	✓	
6	Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	✓	
7	Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>	✓	