

# The Forest of Dean

Naturetrek Tour Report

20 – 22 March 2015

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Mandarin Duck by Greg Mabbett



Two-barred Crossbill by Tom Mabbett



Common Crossbill by Tom Mabbett



Hawfinch by Tom Mabbett

Report compiled by Greg Mabbett



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Tour Leaders:	Tom Mabbett Greg Mabbett
Participants	Deirdre Sutton Liz Waddy David Hall Susie Hall Tim Taylor Judy Cross Anne Vials Ivor Vials Edward Snelling Christine Snelling Neil Lukes Eldeg Lukes Alison Wattiau Brenda Parry-Jones George Malcolm Sonia Donaghy

## Summary

We had a fantastic weekend exploring the forest, and a great wealth of specialities was found. Superb views of Hawfinch and Crossbill were highlights, with the added bonus of finding, and having great views of, a male Two-barred Crossbill! Eleven species of finch in a single day was excellent and, with Goshawk and Peregrine, and exciting encounters with Wild Boar, it made for a memorable weekend in excellent conditions. We all enjoyed covering varied and very different habitats and had lots of fun along the way.

### Day 1

**Friday 20th March**

The whole group met at the Speech House Hotel, our base for the weekend and, after a drink and a chat with everyone, we had a lovely three-course meal and a presentation from Tom on the beautiful and exciting wildlife of the Forest of Dean. The group headed for bed in anticipation of great weekend ahead!

### Day 2

**Saturday 21st March**

We started the day with a pre-breakfast walk at 7am – it was a beautiful sunny start to the weekend. About half of the group fancied the early start, and we decided to jump in the vans and head the short distance to Parkend Green, with the intention of locating some Hawfinch. It wasn't long before we spotted three of these large finches on top of one of the Lime trees, looking to drop into the Yew trees below, to start feeding. The birds flew in and out of the trees on occasion, showing well for the whole group. A great start! Other birds active on the morning were a pair of Mandarin Duck, in flight overhead. There were also Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Goldfinch, Greenfinch, Nuthatch and the final bird was a Cormorant, flying in the distance. After some great views, we headed back to the hotel for a hearty breakfast that set us up well for the day ahead. Suitably fed,

everyone headed for the vans for our first stop at Crabtree Hill – a vast glade surrounded by mixed woodland. On the short walk to the glade there were Siskin constantly calling overhead and Goldcrest singing in the Hemlock trees. As we were walking through the centre of the glade, we were delighted to find the wintering Great Grey Shrike, showing fantastically – diving to the floor and attempting to catch prey – really spectacular! Linnet and Meadow Pipit passed overhead, as the whole group were enjoying great views of the Shrike. A Marsh Tit was briefly singing as it passed down the hedge line. As our walk looped round the edge of the glade, we had views of Long-tailed Tit, Coal Tit, Blue Tit and Great Tit, and a smart male Great Spotted Woodpecker was feeding on a dead Birch stump! Fantastic views through the scope were had by the whole group. On the way back to the van, we had good views of a male Siskin as it was singing from the tree tops, before we headed off to Yew Tree Break.

After arriving at Yew Tree Break, we left the van and headed down the wide stone track, with woods on our left and a glade on our right. We could immediately hear Crossbill calling overhead, and we located three juveniles loafing at the top of a Spruce tree, with an adult female feeding on cones just beneath. The whole group enjoyed excellent views of these birds as they moved around the top of the tree. After a short while, we continued on down the track and, as we approached a line of Pine trees to our right, a few more Crossbill emerged and Greg managed to spot a male Two-barred Crossbill which flew overhead but, unfortunately, went out of view. We paused in the hope it would return. With no luck, we carried on further down the track, taking a left hand turn. Spotting a block of mature Larch trees, a favourite feeding tree of the Two-Barred Crossbill, we slowly walked through with the hope we could locate the bird. With more Crossbill overhead, we stopped to scope up a male feeding in a Larch and, as we were enjoying the bird, Greg spotted the Two-barred Crossbill once again – feeding high in another Larch with a Lesser Redpoll and female Chaffinch. With an excited rush from the group, we managed to get a couple of scopes on the bird and everyone enjoyed great views of this stunning rosy-red Crossbill – a very rare encounter indeed! After around a quarter of an hour the bird flew, and was heard calling from a nearby tree but was sadly now out of view, so we followed the track back towards the van with a few more Chaffinch calling overhead. Sonia also spotted an early flowering Coltsfoot. After a brilliant morning, we'd worked up a good appetite and headed to Parkend for lunch.

We arrived at The Fountain Inn where we all enjoyed a pub lunch, filled with talk of the morning's exploits. When everyone was finished, we headed for New Fancy View. After a short walk up the bank, we reached the viewpoint which looks over roughly a third of the Forest – a truly unique view of the Forest of Dean. We stood at the viewpoint for around 45 minutes, experiencing great views of Buzzard, Raven and Siskin, with a pair of Goshawk interacting over the woods to the right and, although distant, key features of these impressive raptors could be seen. We then headed for the last stop of the day, Brierley – a lovely wooded walk. Walking along the main stone track, we had Larch and Pine trees on our left and scattered trees in a more open area on our right. We slowly walked along the track and noticed a large flock of finches on our left, which was mainly Chaffinch with a couple of Brambling giving brief views. There was also Goldcrest and a Chiffchaff feeding low in the open trees. Carrying on along the track, a Brambling was located which the whole group enjoyed – getting great views of the features which differentiate them from a Chaffinch. Further along, we turned up a bank where a pair of Bullfinch showed well in the top of a Larch. As we walked along the top of the ridge, evening had set in, with a lot of birds heading in to roost. We managed to get views of a Treecreeper before heading back to the vans and back for the night. Sonia, on the walk back to the van, saw a Wild Boar cross the track and, on the drive back to the hotel, we were lucky enough to stumble across a whole sounder of Wild Boar! Three sows and around 20 piglets feeding through the undergrowth!

After a delicious three-course meal back at the hotel and going through the checklist for the day, those keen to see more Boar and do a bit of spotlighting met back at the vans at 9pm. We drove along some pre-planned routes with a spotlight and large torches scanning into the edge of the woods in the hope of locating some Boar, as well as any other nocturnal wildlife. We were not disappointed! We encountered six Boar on the edge of the Forest, briefly, before they shuffled off into the wood. Fallow Deer and Fox were also seen. After around an hour's drive we decided to call it a night and get some well-earned rest.

## Day 3

## Sunday 22nd March

Once again, those that were keen met for a pre-breakfast walk. We headed on a short drive to Parkend. En route, we had a single Fallow Deer on the side of the road. At Parkend, we stood on the village green again, enjoying views of Hawfinch, Greenfinch and Goldfinch, as they went about their morning routine. With quarter of an hour to spare, we popped to a nearby river, in hope of Dipper. At the first bridge, we had extremely close up views of a Treecreeper carrying nest material and a Dipper flew past without stopping. We headed downstream to the next bridge, where we located two Dipper interacting with each other and feeding, giving fantastic views! It was time for breakfast, so we headed back to the rest of the group for another hearty breakfast.

After breakfast, we headed to Staple Edge. As soon as we arrived, we heard a Firecrest singing in the nearby trees. Standing and waiting, the bird came very low down and gave very good views for the whole group. After a short while, we headed out onto the open glade. With the calls of Redpoll and Siskin in the air, we made our way along the path. We located a large flock of Redpoll that were constantly calling overhead and feeding in nearby Birch trees, giving us time to get them in the scope and analyse the birds. Also feeding with them were a few Siskin and Goldfinch and, in the trees behind us, Tom picked up two female Crossbills, perched low in an Oak tree. These gave outstanding views as they moved around the tree, pecking at lichen. After everyone had their fill of the great birding at Staple Edge, we had one last fly-by – Great Spotted Woodpecker.

Cannop Ponds was our next destination where we had a short walk around the lake, enjoying great views of many water birds including up to 10 pairs of Mandarin Duck, Tufted Duck, Little Grebe, Coots, Moorhens, Cormorant and Grey Wagtail. Also in the surrounding woodland we had good views of Nuthatch, Raven and Treecreeper.

We jumped in the vans and headed for Symonds Yat viewpoint on the edge of the Forest, overlooking the River Wye. Here we had around 90 minutes to enjoy the viewpoint and the surrounding woodlands, with a warming coffee in the café. The pair of resident Peregrine were sitting on the nesting ledge for some time, before flying and giving great views and behaviour, seeing off inquisitive Ravens. A pair of Buzzard sat proudly in a tree, showing well. Stock Doves and Raven were abundant. Birds on the river were a pair of Mandarin, Canada Goose and Goosander, and a single Cormorant. Coal Tits and Nuthatch were showing very closely, at the seed Greg put out. A fly-by Sparrowhawk was the only one of the weekend. Jays were seen and heard calling in the canopy as we headed back to the van, and the weather improved as we made our way for lunch.

After enjoying the sun in the pub garden, the New Inn in Shortstanding, we headed back to the Parkend village green, for one last search for Hawfinch. Luckily, the birds were feeding on the ground soon after we arrived, giving great views for the whole group. After this, we had a short journey to Nagshead Nature Reserve: lovely, ancient Oak woodland. We had a stunning walk through the quiet and tranquil wood as it glowed in the

afternoon sun, trying to locate any birds we could hear. Coal Tit, Chaffinch, Song Thrush, Blue Tit, Treecreeper, Great Spotted Woodpecker and of course Nuthatch were all seen, with the pair of Nuthatch investigating a nest site and giving outstanding views. As the afternoon drew on, we returned to the vans and headed back to the hotel. We met in the dining room to fill in the final checklist, before saying our goodbyes after a fantastic weekend of wildlife watching.

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## Species Lists

Birds (✓ = recorded but not counted; H = heard only)

	Common name	Scientific name	March	
			21	22
1	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	☐	✓
2	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	☐	✓
3	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓
4	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	☐	✓
5	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓
6	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	☐	✓
7	Mandarin Duck	<i>Aix galericulata</i>	✓	✓
8	Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>	☐	✓
9	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	☐	✓
10	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	☐	✓
11	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓
12	Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	✓	☐
13	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	☐	✓
14	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓
15	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	☐	✓
16	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	☐	✓
17	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓	
18	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	☐
19	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	☐	✓
20	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	✓	✓
21	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓
22	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	☐
23	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓	✓
24	Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	✓	☐
25	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	☐	✓
26	Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>	✓	
27	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓	✓
28	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓
29	Western Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	✓	✓
30	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓
31	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓
32	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓
33	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	✓	✓
34	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>	✓	☐
35	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓
36	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓
37	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	✓	✓
38	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	
39	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>	☐	✓
40	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	✓	✓
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>	✓	✓
46	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	✓	✓
47	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	March	
			21	22
48	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	✓	☐
49	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓
50	White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>	☐	✓
51	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓
52	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓
53	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrelli</i>	✓	☐
54	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	✓	✓
55	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	☐
56	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓
57	Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>	✓	☐
58	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothrustes</i>	✓	✓
59	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	✓	✓
60	European Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris</i>	✓	✓
61	Common Linnet	<i>Acanthis cannabina</i>	✓	☐
62	Lesser Redpoll	<i>Carduelis cabaret</i>	✓	✓
63	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	✓	✓
64	Two-barred Crossbill	<i>Loxia leucoptera</i>	✓	
65	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓
66	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>	✓	✓

### Mammals

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	Bank Vole	<i>Myodes glareolus</i>		✓