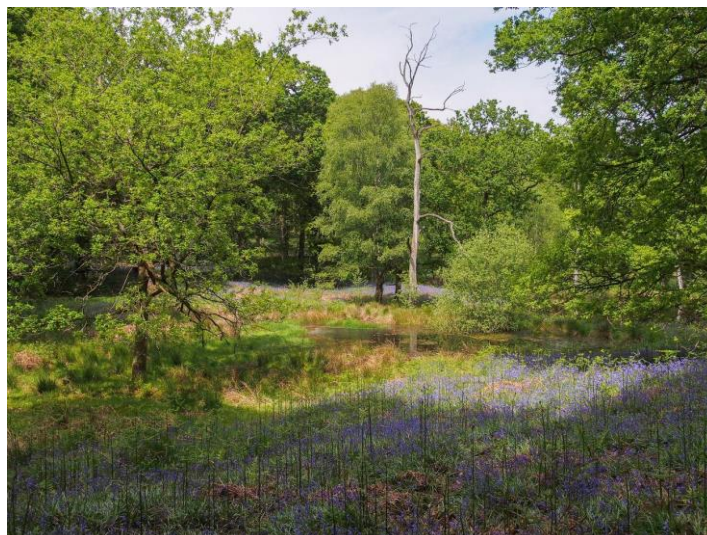


The Forest of Dean

Naturetrek Tour Report

26 – 28 May 2015



Clockwise from top left: Adder (female), Bluebells at Nagshead RSPB, Fallow Deer and Wild Boar

Report and photos by Marcus John except Wild Boar by Elizabeth Ash



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Tour Participants: Marcus John and Greg Mabbett (leaders) with 16 Naturetrek clients

Summary

We spent a thoroughly enjoyable three days exploring the Forest of Dean, seeing a range of wildlife in the warm spring sunshine. We enjoyed close views of special breeding birds like Redstart, Pied Flycatcher, Wood Warbler and Firecrest. We saw lots of Fallow Deer and even found a female Adder, but the close encounters with large groups of Wild Boar were the undoubted highlight!

Day 1

Tuesday 26th May

We gathered together in the dining room of the historic Speech House Hotel at 6.30pm, where Marcus gave a brief presentation on the history and ecology of the Forest, including an introduction to the species that we hoped to encounter. After an excellent three-course dinner, we set out on our evening walk.

Although we were visiting an area known to hold breeding Nightjars, the best birds seen were a Tawny Owl and two roding Woodcock, the latter beautifully silhouetted as they flew low across the tops of the pines. Best of all, we enjoyed clear views of several groups of Fallow Deer as they emerged to feed at dusk. The Forest is home to a thriving population of this species and they have lived here for hundreds of years.

Day 2

Wednesday 27th June

Before breakfast, most of the group took a stroll through the Cyril Hart Arboretum, which is situated just behind the hotel. We saw two Firecrests, one low down in an Oak, the other more typically high up in a pine tree. We studied a pair of Stock Doves through the scope, noting the differences between this species and Wood Pigeon. We also watched a pair of Coal Tits visiting a nest that was almost at ground level, in a low stone wall.

After a hearty breakfast, we spent a sunny morning at Nagshead RSPB Reserve. As we climbed out of the vehicles, we immediately heard the pretty song of a Wood Warbler. We walked along the short trail, where we paused to watch commoner species like Nuthatch and Treecreeper. Just before the stream, Greg saw a Redstart fly across the path. We stopped to look for it and Marcus quickly found a male Pied Flycatcher, which we watched feeding for the next 30 minutes, enjoying remarkable views. At the same time, the male Redstart started showing exceptionally well, sitting out in the open so that everyone was able to study it through the scopes.

We continued on the long trail and found another really obliging pair of Pied Flycatchers, whilst some of the group had brief views of Wild Boar. A stroll down to the Lower Hide, past carpets of beautiful bluebells, revealed a female Mandarin with three ducklings on the pond. A Garden Warbler was also heard singing.

We stopped for a pleasant lunch in the Fountain Inn, Parkend, before visiting the raptor watch-point at New Fancy View. The only birds of prey on view were several Common Buzzards but we were mainly there to look for Adders. Greg quickly found a large adult female, basking in the afternoon sunshine. With care, everyone was able to approach and get great views of Britain's only venomous snake. Just a short drive away, we stopped briefly at Cannop Ponds. Amongst the commoner species on the lake, we found two Little Grebes and a pair of Mandarin Ducks. In the late afternoon, some of us opted to return to the hotel whilst the rest went for a walk

around Yew Tree Brake. We found three Wood Warblers close to the parking area, including a male who showed exceptionally well, calling as it flitted low in the oak trees. We continued on to an open heathy area where we found a Tree Pipit performing its song flight and saw two Crossbills high in a pine tree. Further into the forest, we located a sounder (group) of Wild Boar moving through the bracken; several stripy piglets followed four adults and two half-grown young into the cover of some dense pine trees. As we continued around the corner, we saw two more adult sows and about a dozen piglets running along a forest ride, straight towards us! This time we had unimpeded views of these impressive mammals.

After dinner, we went out again to look for Nightjar. We soon encountered several more Wild Boar, one adult sow with two piglets, approaching to within 20 metres. We heard Tawny Owl and had good views of another roding Woodcock before we picked up the churring song of a Nightjar in the distance. We walked on to a wide area of clear-fell but could not hear any more Nightjars, though we were entertained by good numbers of Pipistrelle bats feeding around our heads.

Day 3

Thursday 28th May

Our pre-breakfast walk took us along the Gloucestershire Way and then back through the Cyril Hart Arboretum. It was a beautiful morning and we enjoyed the songs of commoner species as the sunlight dappled the bluebells. We heard the distinctive song of Common Redstart but two males both stayed out of sight, high in the oak trees.

After another full English breakfast, we set out on our morning walk, first visiting the hidden gem that is Woorgreens Lake. This lovely location is home to several species of breeding water birds; we spent a peaceful half hour watching a pair of Little Grebes feeding a stripy chick, while Swallows, House Martins and Swifts flew over the water, and Willow Warblers sang from the birch trees. We continued our walk around Woorgreens Nature Reserve and onto Crabtree Hill, finding a range of birds typical of this heathland habitat. We enjoyed great views of Tree Pipit, Stonechat and Linnet, whilst Siskins flew overhead. We then found a lovely male Redstart, this time perched on the footpath sign! It was a warm, sunny morning and butterflies included Grizzled Skipper, Green-veined White and Small Heath.

Although lunch beckoned, we decided to drop back into Yew Tree Brake because some of the group had not yet seen Wood Warbler. The warblers were still performing and we also found a pair of Spotted Flycatchers.

After a well-earned break at the New Inn in Small Standing, we continued on to Symond's Yat Rock, which has panoramic views across the River Wye. A pair of Peregrine Falcons has bred here for many years and, luckily, the male was sitting out in full view, above the nest. We spent about an hour scanning for other wildlife, enjoying unusual views as we looked down on Jackdaws, Jays and a soaring Buzzard. Greg found a couple of Fallow Deer on the far side of the river and then a Red Fox ran across the same clearing. Time was against us by now and, reluctantly, we returned to the hotel.

We said our goodbyes and reflected on a hugely enjoyable visit to this wonderful, ancient forest.

Species Lists

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

	Common name	Scientific name	May		
			26	27	28
1	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		2	5
2	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			1
3	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		2	6
4	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	17	2	2
5	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	2	H	2
6	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓
7	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>		2	2
8	Mandarin Duck	<i>Aix galericulata</i>		20	
9	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		10	4
10	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			1
11	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>			1
12	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		✓	✓
13	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		✓	✓
14	Eurasian Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>	2	1	
15	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>		✓	
16	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>		✓	✓
17	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia domestica</i>	✓		
18	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		8	2
19	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>		✓	✓
20	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	1	H	
21	European Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>		H	
22	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>		✓	✓
23	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		6	3
24	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		✓	✓
25	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		✓	✓
26	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>		1	7
27	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrelli</i>		10	2
28	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		6	6
29	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>			2
30	European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>		4	1
31	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		H	1
32	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	H		2
33	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		1	
34	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		2	2
35	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓
36	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>		H	H
37	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>		6	2
38	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>			1
39	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		1	6
40	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		H	H
41	Wood Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>		4	6
42	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓	✓
43	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>		2	3
44	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		3	4
45	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>		3	
46	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		✓	✓
47	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	May		
			26	27	28
48	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓
49	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		15	6
50	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		6	2
51	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		1	1
52	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		✓	✓
53	Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>		10	10
54	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		10	6
55	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		2	2
56	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	
57	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓
58	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		2	2
59	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>		3	3
60	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>			6
61	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		1	
62	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>		12	

Mammals

1	Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>	16	1	2
2	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>		34	
3	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>			1
4	Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>	✓	✓	
5	Pipistrelle species	<i>Pipistrellus sp</i>	6	10	

Reptiles & Amphibians

1	Adder	<i>Vipera berus</i>		1	
2	Common Lizard	<i>Zootoca vivipara</i>		1	1
3	Common Toad (tadpoles)	<i>Bufo bufo</i>		5	

Butterflies

Grizzled Skipper, *Pyrgus malvae*
 Green-veined White, *Pieris napi*
 Brimstone, *Gonepteryx rhamni*
 Small Heath, *Coenonympha pamphilus*

Small White, *Pieris rapae*
 Orange Tip, *Anthocharis cardamines*
 Speckled Wood, *Pararge aegeria*

Dragonflies & Damselflies

Azure Damselfly, *Coenagrion puella*
 Four-spotted Chaser, *Libellula quadrimaculata*

Broad-bodied Chaser, *Libellula depressa*

Other Insects

Wood Ant species, *Formica sp*
 Green Tiger Beetle, *Cicindela campestris*

Honey Bee, *Apis mellifera*
 Dor Beetle, *Geotrupes stercorarius*

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