

The Forest of Dean

Naturetrek Tour Report

4 – 6 June 2015



Photos clockwise from top left: Wood Warbler, Pied Flycatcher, Wild Boar and Garden Warbler

Report compiled by Marcus John



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Tour Participants: Marcus John (leader) with five 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 including Redstart, Wood Warbler, Firecrest and Pied Flycatcher. Birds of prey included Red Kite, Peregrine and Hobby. Two female Adders basking in the sun were perhaps only bettered by two showy Wild Boar piglets!

Day 1

Thursday 4th June

Our tour started when we met together at the historic Speech House Hotel for an introductory presentation from Marcus. He gave a brief description of the history and ecology of the Forest of Dean, identifying the key species that we hoped to encounter during the tour.

After an excellent dinner, we set off on our evening walk around Woogreens Nature Reserve, where Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust and Forest Enterprise are recreating a large area of heathland habitat. As we walked through dense woodland, we heard a young Tawny Owl calling from deep in the conifers. As we reached the open heath, several Pipistrelle bats swooped low as they fed in the darkening sky. We heard the squeaking call of Woodcock before we eventually saw a male on his roding flight just above the pines, though he quickly disappeared into the shade. We had more sightings of Woodcock but unfortunately any Nightjars remained silent.

After we left the heath and re-entered the woodland, we used a spotlight to find six Fallow Deer; at first we could only see eye-shine but as we followed them with the torch beam, they walked out of the tree cover and we could see them quite clearly: a lovely way to finish the evening.

Day 2

Friday 5th June

The weather was calm and bright for our pre-breakfast walk through the Cyril Hart Arboretum, which lies immediately behind the hotel. Several commoner species showed well, including both Nuthatch and Treecreeper. The highlight was a beautiful Firecrest, which was feeding low to the ground; we could clearly see the striking head pattern that distinguishes this species from the much commoner Goldcrest.

After breakfast, we had a very pleasant walk around the RSPB reserve at Nagshead. We saw a wide range of woodland species including a pair of Pied Flycatchers at a nest box, and a pair of Redstarts feeding close to path. As we walked the long trail in the sunshine, six Fallow Deer stepped across the path ahead of us. Later on, a sharp grunt alerted us to the presence of Wild Boar. A sub-adult was glimpsed as it headed away from us through the bracken. We waited patiently and were rewarded with great views of two gingery, stripy piglets, which stood out in full view for a couple of minutes until called away by grunts from an adult sow.

After a good pub lunch, we returned to Nagshead to walk down to the lower hide; we walked through the oak trees and bluebells to the pool, where we found a female Mandarin with one duckling. We then drove the short distance to Cannop Ponds, where we immediately saw a Raven perched quite low in a tree by the water. Another

female Mandarin with two ducklings and a summer plumaged Little Grebe were the best birds amongst the common wildfowl. In the late afternoon we walked around Yew Tree Brake. We found a group of Crossbills dropping down to drink from puddles next to the path and enjoyed watching another pair of Redstarts, feeding and perching out in open view. When we arrived back at our vehicle, we had close views of a singing Wood Warbler.

After a delicious three course dinner, we set out to find Nightjar and perhaps more Wild Boar. We parked by Lower Cannop Pond, where we were pleased to find several handsome drake Mandarin. We followed a good path through mixed forest and up to the areas of clear-fell preferred by Nightjar. As the sun set, several Pipistrelle bats came out to feed around our heads, and Woodcocks flew low on their roding display flights. After pausing to enjoy the sound of a churring Nightjar, we had brief views of five adult Wild Boar as they trotted across the path ahead of us. A few minutes later, as we walked back towards Cannop Ponds, an adult Boar exploded from cover with a loud grunt, only metres away from us! When she reached the cover of the trees she grunted again, and several little piglets jumped from their hiding places and scattered through the bracken - a truly memorable encounter.

Day 3

Saturday 6th June

After our full English breakfast, we set off on a long walk around Woorgreens Lake and Reserve. Little Grebes and Tufted Ducks were on the water and around the lake we heard the melodious, flowing song of Willow Warbler. We walked onto the open heath, where Marcus picked out the trilling of Tree Pipits in song flight. We were pleased to find one perched out in the open, with a bill full of caterpillars. Several Linnets were to be expected in this habitat but the Red Kite that drifted over was a pleasant surprise. When we walked back under the oak trees, we could hear the songs of both Redstart and Wood Warbler. As we walked back, Brian was able to give us much expert information on the different tree species and how they are managed; this helped us to appreciate how historical changes in human usage have impacted on the forest we see today.

Next, we paid a brief visit to the watch-point at New Fancy View. Although there were few birds of prey, Marcus found two female Adders basking in the warm sunshine. This unusual sight was undoubtedly one of the highlights of the whole trip!

After a delicious lunch 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, an adult was sitting out in full view. We spent about an hour scanning for other wildlife, enjoying unusual views as we looked down on Jackdaws and Jays. The weather conditions were ideal for birds of prey and, in addition to the Peregrine and Buzzards, we soon saw a dashing Hobby, which flew right along the river. We scanned the wooded ridge opposite and eventually had good views of a female Goshawk as it flew quickly above the trees, an excellent find.

In the late afternoon, we returned to the hotel and reluctantly said our goodbyes. It had been a memorable visit to an ancient forest that offers a fascinating range of wildlife amidst beautiful woodland scenery.

Species Lists

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

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

	Common name	Scientific name	June		
			4	5	6
48	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		2	
49	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		1	1
50	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		2	
51	Eurasian Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>			8
52	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		5	
53	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		1	
54	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		2	2
55	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓
56	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		6	
57	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>			6
58	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>		6	

Mammals

1	Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>	6	6	
2	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>		15	
3	Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>		✓	✓

Reptiles

1	Adder	<i>Vipera berus</i>			2
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Butterflies

Small White, *Pieris rapae*

Green-veined White, *Pieris napi*

Speckled Wood, *Pararge aegeria*

Other Insects

Green Shield Bug, *Palomena prasina*

Hornet, *Vespa crabro*

White-tailed Bumblebee, *Bombus lucorum*

Green Tiger Beetle, *Cicindela campestris*

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