

The Forest of Dean

Naturetrek Tour Report

4 - 6 March 2016

Report compiled by Dave Nevitt & Greg Mabbett



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Tour Participants: Dave Nevitt & Greg Mabbett (leaders) with 13 Naturetrek clients

Summary

We had a fantastic weekend exploring the forest, and we were very lucky to connect with so many difficult species. Good views of Hawfinch and Crossbill were highlights, with the added bonus of finding, and having prolonged views of, a Great Grey Shrike. 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 4th March

The group met at the Speech House Hotel, our base for the weekend. We collected together in our appointed room where we had an introductory chat before our delicious dinner was served. Afterwards Dave gave us a short presentation by way of introduction to the Forest of Dean and the special wildlife that lives here. Our appetites whetted, we headed for bed in anticipation of a great weekend ahead!

Day 2

Saturday 5th March

We started the day with a pre-breakfast walk at 06:45, to which nearly all the group came. We hopped in the buses and drove the short distance to Parkend where our first encounter was with some incredibly tame Fallow Deer – beautiful beasts indeed. As the early morning drizzle took hold, we staked out the Yew trees to wait for Hawfinches to come down to feed. As it grew lighter, we picked out a Mistle Thrush singing its mournful early-spring song from a treetop; Chaffinches were also tuning up for spring but sadly the Hawfinches weren't obliging today. Dave spotted several Hawfinches a good way off in an Oak so we headed that way to try to see them better. We weren't disappointed as we soon had several of these delightful birds in the scopes for all to see! A brief glimpse of some Siskins in a treetop before they flew showed us that there was plenty of activity. Someone foolish mentioned bacon and eggs, which reminded us that we needed to be heading back for breakfast! Walking back to the buses, we stopped at the stream to have a quick look and we were delighted to find a Dipper that sat there for us all to admire in the scopes. As we were watching it, eagle eyes spotted a Treecreeper moving up a tree just behind the Dipper! Being such a secretive bird with quiet calls, this was a very popular find and everyone enjoyed super views.

We were soon back at the hotel for our well-earned breakfast that was scrumptious and very much appreciated! After gathering ourselves, we headed off again, this time to Woorgreens, just up the road from the hotel. We soon heard some high-pitched calls that alerted us to the presence of two Goldcrests, lovely little birds to see. Chaffinches were all around and the group learned their distinctive "pink, pink" calls. We also saw a large flock of Redwings that were moving through the woods, and we managed to scope some of them for all to see.

Moving on to Woorgreens Lake, we saw Little Grebes, a Grey Heron, Canada and Greylag Geese. Tufted Ducks were diving for food and we then picked out two juvenile Goosanders too. A Reed Bunting gave its distinctive call to draw attention to its presence as we made our way along the slippery muddy path.

We were soon out in the open, heading up towards Crabtree Hill. We came across a pair of Mistle Thrushes that showed well on posts. As we learned the differences between the members of the thrush family, Greg heard some Crossbills flying over. We were so lucky that they then landed in a nearby larch tree, where we were able to admire both males and females in the scopes for some time.

Siskins were frequently heard calling as they flew over but they carried on going instead of landing.

Further on in the clearing we had our first Buzzards as the weather finally improved. We were regularly scanning for the Great Grey Shrike that had been frequenting the area. Then Greg spotted it, flying in with some prey in its talons! It promptly disappeared behind some trees, much to the consternation of the group! Creeping on up the path, we saw it flying again but this time it perched up on a tree for all to see. Over the next 15 minutes we were treated to excellent views of this rare bird as it hunted from prominent perches. We saw it with another prey item, that later turned out to be a Blue Tit.

At the top of the hill we saw a flock of Chaffinches and several more Buzzards started thermalling. We retraced our steps to the buses, again encountering the Shrike, plus good views of Coal Tits.

Our next stop was New Fancy View, where we took the steep but short climb to the viewpoint. Greeted by other watchers who had been there for 3 hours without seeing anything, our hopes were dashed, despite the seemingly good weather for raptors circling. However within minutes we were watching a male Goshawk displaying over the ridge to our right. Over the next hour we saw another two Goshawks, a male and a female, interacting as they circled at length. Up to a dozen Buzzards and many Ravens were also enjoying the sunny conditions with enough wind to get lift.

Nuthatches were singing away but there were none of the hoped-for finches moving for some reason. We had had a superb morning catching up with some species that are difficult to find, plus at one site we had had a special avian visitor that has to remain a secret for the group to keep!

It was now time for lunch so we moved to the Fountain Inn to enjoy our warm and welcoming food.

Afterwards we looked in the car park for Dippers again then walked to Parkend Church Woods for finches. We enjoyed good views of another popular Treecreeper and some Long-tailed Tits but it was otherwise pretty quiet so we decanted to Brierley to try our luck there.

Along the base of the ridge we had good views of Bullfinch and plenty of Coal Tits and we marvelled at the low-flying Buzzards circling above our heads. More Siskins were calling above us but again they didn't perch for us.

By now the sun was starting to go down and the woods fell pretty silent as the residents prepared for their roost. We were soon back at the buses and headed to the hotel. On our journey we stopped at a small pond where we saw 8 Mandarins as well as a splendid pair of very smart Grey Wagtails. A flock of Redwings on the adjacent field were our closing birds for the day.

After a rest, we met for our lovely dinner and checklists. Afterwards we gathered in the car park for our night time foray into the forest in the buses. As we drove around, we were soon picking out small groups of Fallow

Deer as their eyes twinkled in the spotlights. A couple of Red Foxes were sneaking about, then we saw the distinctive outline of a Muntjac Deer with its funny short legs. We listened out for owls but there was no sound. Once more we travelled the circuit in our quest for Wild Boar but sadly they weren't out tonight so we returned to the hotel and our well-earned beds.

Day 3

Sunday 6th March

After our hearty breakfast we ventured south towards the RSPB Nagshead reserve. As we approached Parkend, Greg spotted something out of the corner of his eye that had the buses doing a U-turn – two Wild Boar!! They were surprisingly tame as a dog walker passed them by and we all had quite close views as two adults sneaked off back into the undergrowth. A lucky few also saw several piglets with them. What a delight, particularly as we hadn't seen them last night. Well spotted Greg!

Arriving at Nagshead, we heard Mistle Thrush and Song Thrush in the car park then we moved along the trail that went through the old Oak woods. It was a beautiful still sunny morning and we were hopeful of finding Lesser Spotted Woodpecker in these ideal conditions at the ideal time of year. Blue Tits and Great Tits were busy pairing up and singing away as we scoured the tree tops in search of the Woodpecker. We thought we heard one briefly some way off but couldn't be sure. Nuthatches that were singing away and showing themselves on the bare branches entertained us. Song Thrushes were feeding on the woodland floor, then we were treated to the sight of a lovely Buzzard perched up on a low branch. The woodpecker had eluded us today so we boarded the buses and moved on north to Symonds Yat. Many took advantage of the café there for a welcome drink as we took in the amazing view across the river valley. The male Peregrine was standing sentinel over his territory from an Ash tree perch giving great views. Presumably his female was off hunting somewhere. We looked for Goshawks but none were in view today – just a single Sparrowhawk circling with the many Buzzards. Three Goosander flew along the river and Stock Doves were spotted flying past too.

We were now getting hungry so we adjourned to the New Inn at Shortstanding for lunch. As it was Mothers' Day, we had rather a long wait for our food but when it did arrive it was delicious.

The delay over lunch meant that we had to reconsider our plans for the afternoon, so we dropped those who wanted an early departure back at the hotel before continuing to Cannop Ponds. We heard either Marsh or Willow Tit calling from the bus so we stopped to check it out. Brief sightings suggested Willow but this one was not confirmed so went down as "the one that got away"! At the feeders we were entertained by many tits of three species as well as a jolly Nuthatch. The lake provided 17 Mandarins, Tufted Ducks, Moorhens, Coots, a pair of Gadwall and Little Grebes. Returning to the feeders, we were treated to a beautiful Great Spotted Woodpecker, a species that we had heard a couple of times but had been surprisingly inconspicuous this weekend. We also had excellent views of yet another Treecreeper, a real crowd-pleaser that was a fitting last bird as the rain started and we decided to call it a day.

Any group is only as good as the people who form it and thanks must go to all the group members who got on so well together, sharing knowledge and stories to enhance the overall enjoyment of the trip. Greg and Dave hope that everyone had an enjoyable weekend, seeing many new species in a beautiful part of the country. We look forward to seeing you all on your next Naturetrek trip.

Species Lists

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

	Common name	Scientific name	March	
			5	6
1	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	2	✓
2	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	1	
3	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	4	
4	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓
5	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓	
6	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓
7	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>		2
8	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	✓	✓
9	Mandarin Duck	<i>Aix galericulata</i>	8	17
10	Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>	2	3
11	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓
12	Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	3	
13	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		2
14	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓
15	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		✓
16	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		1
17	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓
18	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓
19	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓
20	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	
21	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	
22	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia domestica</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	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓	✓
27	Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>	✓	
28	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓	✓
29	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓
30	Western Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	✓	✓
31	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>		✓
32	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓
33	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓
34	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</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	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	✓	✓
38	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓
39	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	✓	✓
40	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	✓	✓
41	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		✓
42	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓
43	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	✓	✓
44	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓
45	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	✓	✓
46	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	March	
			5	6
47	White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>	2	
48	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓
49	Duncock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓
50	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrelli</i>	✓	✓
51	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	✓	
52	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓
53	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothrustes</i>	✓	
54	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	✓	✓
55	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓	
56	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	✓	
57	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓
58	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>	H	H

Mammals

1	Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>	✓	✓
2	Muntjac Deer	<i>Muntiacus capreolus</i>	✓	
3	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>		✓
4	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	✓	
5	Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>	✓	✓

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