

The Forest of Dean

Naturetrek Tour Report

18 - 20 March 2016



Great Grey Shrike



Wild Boar

Report & images compiled by Martin McGill



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Tour participants: Martin McGill (leader) with eight Naturetrek clients

Summary

Time spent in the Forest of Dean is always a very pleasant experience at any time of year; an early spring visit is worthwhile to locate the many special birds of the area as they begin to sing to attract a mate and claim territories. It also helps if there are no leaves on the trees, to make finding them easier.

This trip combined some extended walks through prime habitat with a number of regular stops in good areas over the two days. We all managed to see and hear nearly 60 species of bird, with great views of some, and a chance to hear the songs of many others

Day 1

Friday 18th March

We all met up in the hotel for dinner, with time beforehand. It gave us all the chance to introduce ourselves and for Martin to give a little background information on what to expect, to run through our intended target species and plans for the next two days. After dinner most of us assembled to have a look at a map of the area which also gave the opportunity to ask any more questions, before retiring for the evening.

Day 2

Saturday 19th March

We started the day with a pre-breakfast walk from the hotel, with the intention of listening to bird song as well as seeing what we could find. We were soon watching Nuthatches working over the twigs and branches for food items. A pair of Raven also kept us company; it was soon apparent that they were gaining a meal from an unfortunate road casualty. Some close fly-pasts by these large birds allowed direct comparison with the smaller Carrion Crows.

The field adjacent held many Song Thrushes and up to four Mistle Thrushes, plus c25 wintering Redwing. A short walk into the woods soon gave us the easily overlooked but distinctive sound of Hawfinch. After some hard searching, we eventually had scope and binocular views of one in the canopy; at least three were present before they flew off together to forage for the day.

We also noted the usual Blue and Great Tits, Woodpigeons, Jackdaws and a pair of Stock Dove; the latter were also very vocal, no doubt nesting in a hole nearby in one of the old oaks.

After a very good breakfast we set out for another walk. We started at Woorgreens Lake where a male Mandarin was seen in flight; the lake held Canada and Greylag Geese, Coot, Moorhen, Mallard, Tufted Ducks and at least six Little Grebes. A party of feeding tits (Blue, Great, Coal and Long-tailed) were making their way through the Alder trees that fringed the plantation; we briefly saw two Siskin with them.

Heading out across the heathland, we made our way to Crabtree Hill, a good vantage point. It was not long before we were watching a smashing male Great Grey Shrike as it hunted from exposed perches, looking for anything from small birds and lizards to beetles and bees. We also saw a pair of Stonechat. Heading into the oak

woods we listened very carefully for any woodpeckers. It was quiet probably due to the NE breeze and it being overcast keeping things cool.

Our patience was rewarded with three Crossbills that perched above and allowed great scope views: a red male and two yellow/green females. They dropped to the ditch to drink before going back into the trees and flying away to the plantations. We also managed to see some Siskins feeding in the birches. (This species was constantly flying over us for most of the weekend.) We made our way back to our start point after completing this pleasant walk. On the return leg one or two more fly-over Crossbill were heard and a party of Blue Tits passed through the larches demonstrating that finding food, not singing, was their priority. Another smart Stonechat was also seen before we passed the lake again.

Our next stop was at New Fancy View, another good lookout across the woodlands and hills. A few pairs of Buzzard and Raven were on the wing; some of the latter were tumble-flight displaying distantly. We had a brief view of a female Goshawk flying along the ridge before it disappeared from view. Equally, the three Peregrine Falcons that rose up from the same spot did not show for long. Deciding that the weather was not encouraging the raptors, we headed off to another spot to check the woods before making our way to Parkend, to one of the pubs.

Before making our way in, we had time to enjoy a Dipper that hopped back and forth across the stream giving us great views; it eventually flew right at us and low overhead before rocketing off downstream. It was a perfect end to the morning birding session before we enjoyed some warm food and a drink.

After lunch we tried our luck around the village, seeing a few common species and hearing singing Mistle Thrush. At the church we saw two Great Spotted Woodpeckers chasing through the trees. Another stop close by to search for Wild Boar and Brambling was rather quiet; however, returning to the transport we were greeted by a large party of Wild Boar which included a few families. Perhaps 20 piglets were seen with approx. eight adults including a large male.

The next half an hour or so was delightful as we studied their behaviour and watched the antics of the little ones. We had walked past this group on the way out; they were obviously aware of us but we could not see them in the dense cover. Approaching closer, they all soon melted away into the plantation, leaving everyone was happy with such great views.

Our next stop was a Cannop Ponds where a gathering of 24 outrageously plumaged Mandarin drakes and ducks were on show among the Mallards. A pair of Grey Wagtail fed along the stream and, as someone had put out lots of bread, there were dozens of tits and finches coming down to feed. A walk through the woods brought us to a clearing where Lesser Spotted Woodpecker had been drumming but it was now silent. Compensation came in the form of two more Wild Boar with a piglet, once again in the open. Making our way back to the transport at dusk, we tried our luck at one more spot hoping for an early season Firecrest; none were heard but we did see Goldcrests.

The light was fading so we drove the short journey back to the hotel to settle in for the evening. An post-dinner evening Boar hunt was offered but declined: we could not top the views we had enjoyed earlier in the day and the England rugby match was also a distraction for some.

Day 3

Sunday 20th March

Another pre-breakfast walk was offered and, once again, we were soon onto the trail of three Hawfinches. These shy birds can be difficult to see and our trio demonstrated this; we did, however, get one bird in the scope for all to see. The Forest of Dean half-marathon was gearing up, with the start line situated by the hotel, so we moved on to begin another walk from New Fancy View to Three Brothers. Above the woods Buzzards were noted plus a Great Spotted Woodpecker and Treecreeper. A Green Woodpecker called once, but failed to show so we walked back to New Fancy View for another try for Goshawk.

Walking up to the viewpoint, we once again heard a Green Woodpecker, a Mistle Thrush showed itself and a Song Thrush sang its heart out. We also saw a pair or two of Bullfinch in the bushes. At the top we settled in to scan for more birds. Careful panning revealed a very distant male Goshawk that also had a good view of the area. It was not too long before a female Goshawk flew across the valley displaying and also perched in a larch atop the ridge. Thankfully the telescope allowed for prolonged steady views.

Other birds seen included another Great Spotted Woodpecker, plenty of fly-by Siskins and Greenfinches, before we went back to our transport.

Travelling to the northern section of the forest via Cinderford (due to the half-marathon), we set off on another walk around the Brierley area. A few of the commoner species such as Nuthatch were seen, one Crossbill flew over calling, and a pair of Sparrowhawks were in display over the plantation. Pleasingly, the cloud appeared to be clearing.

Our next stop was a half-hour drive but we stopped along the way to hand in a food order at the pub, planning to return at 2pm. At Symond's Yat we walked to the viewpoint as the sun shone; magnificent views were to be had across the River Wye and beyond. A male Peregrine was present on the nest crag so we all saw him well in the telescope. He eventually took flight and circled before heading away from us into the distance. A pair of Raven and at least 11 Buzzards were also on the wing as it warmed up. It was time to head back to the pub for lunch.

Our last stop of the day was at Yew Tree Brake to take in another walk to Crabtree Hill. It was largely quiet but once again we saw and heard the Great Grey Shrike and Stonechats singing. The shrike was seen to catch and devour a Bumblebee. A Linnet flew by and a pair of Goshawk circled high over the woods in the distance. The walk back in the sunshine was a fitting end to the day, the tour concluded after the short drive back to the hotel where we all said our goodbyes after a delightful weekend.

Naturetrek Facebook

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Species Lists

Birds

Canada Goose <i>Branta canadensis</i>	Greylag Goose <i>Anser anser</i>
Mute Swan <i>Cygnus olor</i>	Mandarin Duck <i>Aix galericulata</i>
Mallard <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Tufted Duck <i>Aythya fuligula</i>
Little Grebe <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	Grey Heron <i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Great Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Eurasian Sparrowhawk <i>Accipiter nisus</i>
Northern Goshawk <i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	Common Buzzard <i>Buteo buteo</i>
Peregrine Falcon <i>Falco peregrinus</i>	Common Moorhen <i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
Common Coot <i>Fulica atra</i>	Black-headed Gull <i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>
Lesser Black-backed Gull <i>Larus fuscus</i>	Stock Dove <i>Columba oenas</i>
Common Wood Pigeon <i>Columba palumbus</i>	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker <i>Dendrocopos minor</i>
Great Spotted Woodpecker <i>Dendrocopos major</i>	Green Woodpecker <i>Picus viridis</i>
Great Grey Shrike <i>Lanius excubitor</i>	Eurasian Jay <i>Garrulus glandarius</i>
Eurasian Magpie <i>Pica pica</i>	Western Jackdaw <i>Corvus monedula</i>
Carrion Crow <i>Corvus corone</i>	Northern Raven <i>Corvus corax</i>
White-throated Dipper <i>Cinclus cinclus</i>	Goldcrest <i>Regulus regulus</i>
Eurasian Wren <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Coal Tit <i>Parus ater</i>
Eurasian Blue Tit <i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	Great Tit <i>Parus major</i>
Long-tailed Tit <i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	Eurasian Nuthatch <i>Sitta europaea</i>
Eurasian Treecreeper <i>Certhia familiaris</i>	Common Blackbird <i>Turdus merula</i>
Redwing <i>Turdus iliacus</i>	Song Thrush <i>Turdus philomelos</i>
Mistle Thrush <i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	European Robin <i>Erithacus rubecula</i>
European Stonechat <i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	House Sparrow <i>Passer domesticus</i>
Duncock <i>Prunella modularis</i>	Grey Wagtail <i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
Pied Wagtail <i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>	Meadow Pipit <i>Anthus pratensis</i>
Chaffinch <i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Hawfinch <i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>
Common Bullfinch <i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	Common Linnet <i>Linaria cannabina</i>
Lesser Redpoll <i>Acanthis flammea cabaret</i>	European Greenfinch <i>Chloris chloris</i>
European Goldfinch <i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	Red Crossbill <i>Loxia curvirostra</i>
Eurasian Siskin <i>Spinus spinus</i>	

Other tax

Wild Boar *Sus scrofa*

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