

The Forest of Dean

Naturetrek Tour Report

17 - 19 March 2017



White-throated Dipper



Common Merganser (Goosander)



Great Grey Shrike



Male Red Crossbill

Report and images by Greg Mabbett



Naturetrek Mingledown Barn Wolf's Lane Chawton Alton Hampshire GU34 3HJ UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour participants: Greg Mabbett (leader) with a group of eight Naturetrek clients

Summary

We spent a fantastic weekend in the historic Forest of Dean searching for its stunning wildlife and we weren't disappointed, with excellent views of Hawfinch, Crossbill, Great Grey Shrike and Goshawk. We were even lucky enough to see Wild Boar.

Day 1

Friday 17th March

We met in the Speech House Hotel shortly after 6pm and after our introductions, we ran through the itinerary for the weekend and enjoyed a delicious three-course meal. To kick off the weekend we went out for a night drive to search for Wild Boar. After having brief sightings of a single Wild Boar we continued on, in the hope of seeing more. We came across some Fallow Deer and a Fox, and finally had great views of a sounder of Wild Boar! After the successful drive we headed back to the hotel for the night.

Day 2

Saturday 18th March

We started the day with a pre-breakfast walk at Parkend. Standing on the village green with the hope of seeing Hawfinch, we spotted Green Woodpecker, Goldfinch, Bullfinch, Mistle Thrush and a Buzzard in a field. With no sign of any Hawfinch, we went for a walk towards the Fountain Inn. After a short scanning session we spotted a pair of Hawfinch, giving good telescope views. As we returned we spotted a pair of Dipper on the river giving excellent views – a great start to the day. After this, we headed back for breakfast.

Our first stop after breakfast was Crabtree Hill. We started the walk at Woorgreens Lake. Walking past the lake we spotted a few common waterfowl species. As we entered the open glade we spotted Stonechat and a stunning Great Grey Shrike. As we watched the shrike we could hear the squeals of young Boar in the vegetation in front of us! We carried on the walk around the glade seeing Reed Bunting, Meadow Pipit and Buzzard. Finishing the walk back past the lake we saw a Toad on the path.

The next port of call was New Fancy View. We stood at the viewpoint, enjoying the lovely views and scanning the interior of the forest for about an hour in the hope of seeing Goshawk. Birds seen included Buzzard, Sparrowhawk, Hawfinch, Siskin, Chiffchaff, and eventually the sought-after Goshawk! It gave brief views, flying along the edge of the forest. We then headed back to the Speech House Hotel for lunch.

The first stop after lunch was Brierley. We started off with views of a few Redpoll moving low near the track. Carrying on the walk we saw Buzzard overhead and managed to get Siskin in the telescope. Carrying on towards the top of the ridge we flushed a surprise Grey Wagtail from the damp wood. There was a huge mixed flock of Siskin and Redpoll feeding in the Larch trees. We also saw Great Spotted Woodpecker and Bullfinch. We headed back to the vehicle and made our way to the last stop of the day – Yew Tree Break.

The first bird seen was a stunning, perched female Crossbill, and the whole group enjoyed great views as we made our way around the track. Also seen were Buzzard, Nuthatch, Sparrowhawk, Goldfinch and good views of Redpoll in the scope. As we made our way back, a distant Goshawk gave brief views and a pair of Crossbills

were loafing in a tree by the track, giving fantastic views of the bright red male and the yellow-green female. A fantastic end to a great day's birding! We headed back to the hotel, giving everyone an hour or so to get ready for supper at 7pm.

We enjoyed another delicious three-course meal while chatting about the day's events. With a keen few wanting another night drive, we headed out. Unfortunately no Boar were seen but we did enjoy great views of Fox and Fallow Deer.

Day 3

Sunday 19th March

We started the day with another pre-breakfast walk, this time at Horse Lawn. A Green Woodpecker was the first bird of the day, first heard calling and then seen in flight. As we entered the woodland an early returning Firecrest was heard singing high in the spruce. We spent some time trying to get views of this small, fast-moving species and all enjoyed good views. As we continued on, we saw Treecreeper and a shocked Fox stood in the middle of the track before darting off into cover. After this great start to the day we headed back for breakfast.

Having enjoyed a hearty 'Full English' breakfast, we headed to Cannop Ponds. On the ponds were a great array of waterfowl including Mandarin Duck, Tufted Duck, Wigeon, Gadwall, Coot, Moorhen and a stunning Little Grebe in summer plumage. After throwing some seed on the track, a tit flock instantly came down to feed giving us point-blank views of Coal, Marsh, Great and Blue Tits with Chaffinch and Nuthatch also joining them. We spent some time looking at the differences between the tits. A pair of Treecreeper was also in the vicinity. We carried on our walk around the pond with a female Goosander spotted, roosting on the far bank, just feet from the path. As we came closer she was un-phased, giving fantastic views of this beautiful diving duck. We returned to the vehicle and headed for Symonds Yat.

We spent the rest of the morning until lunchtime enjoying the birds and stunning views from the top of Symonds Yat viewpoint. The resident Peregrine pair gave good perched and in-flight views on-and-off all morning. Other birds seen were Raven, Cormorant, Kingfisher, Red Kite, Coal Tit, March Tit and Nuthatch. On two occasions a juvenile Goshawk was seen getting mobbed by Crows, and also soaring with Buzzards. In a nearby field, we also spotted a Fallow Deer. A change of plan for lunch – we stayed and had lunch in the Symonds Yat café.

With everyone replete we headed to Nags Head RSPB reserve where we enjoyed a walk through the beautiful ancient and untouched Oak woodland. We had views of a couple of tit flocks, Nuthatch, Hawfinch briefly in the telescope, and good views of Great Spotted Woodpecker and Buzzard. After an hour or so in these idyllic surroundings, we were back at the vehicle and headed to our last site – Parkend.

We walked from the Fountain Inn over the railway line up through Parkend wood, past the church. With a Sparrowhawk circling overhead, we had good views of Great Spotted Woodpecker, Goldcrest and Treecreeper. As we made our way along the track a large herd of Fallow Deer were in the thick cover, giving good views as they charged off. Reaching the furthest point of our walk, a single Crossbill was seen and heard overhead. We slowly made our way back to the vehicle. Back in Parkend we had great views of a Goshawk flying over the wood – the perfect end to the weekend.

We headed back to the Speech House Hotel, filling in the check list and saying our final farewells before departing for home.

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Species Lists

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

	Common name	Scientific name	March		
			17	18	19
1	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		✓	✓
2	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		□	✓
3	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		✓	□
4	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		✓	✓
5	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		✓	□
6	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		✓	✓
7	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓	✓
8	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>		✓	✓
9	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>			✓
10	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>		✓	✓
11	Mandarin Duck	<i>Aix galericulata</i>		□	✓
12	Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>			✓
13	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>			✓
14	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		✓	✓
15	Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>		✓	✓
16	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓	✓
17	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			✓
18	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>		✓	✓
19	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		✓	✓
20	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>		✓	✓
21	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>		□	✓
22	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</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 Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>		✓	□
27	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>			✓
28	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		✓	✓
29	European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		✓	✓
30	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	□
31	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>		✓	✓
32	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		✓	□
33	Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>		✓	□
34	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>		✓	✓
35	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>		✓	✓
36	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓	□
37	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		✓	✓
38	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>		✓	✓
39	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓
40	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	□	✓	□
41	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>		✓	✓
42	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>			✓
43	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>		✓	✓
44	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>		□	✓
45	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>		✓	✓
46	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>		□	✓
47	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>		✓	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	March		
			17	18	19
48	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓
49	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓
50	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>		✓	✓
51	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		✓	✓
52	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		☐	✓
53	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		☐	✓
54	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>		✓	✓
55	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		✓	✓
56	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓
57	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		✓	☐
58	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓	
59	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓
60	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>		✓	
61	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓	✓
62	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		✓	✓
63	Lesser Redpoll	<i>Carduelis cabaret</i>		✓	☐
64	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		✓	✓
65	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothrustes</i>		✓	✓
66	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>		✓	✓
67	Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>		✓	☐

Other Taxa

1	Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>	✓	☐	✓
2	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>	✓	H	☐
3	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	✓	☐	✓
4	Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>	☐	✓	✓
5	Common Toad	<i>Bufo bufo</i>		✓	