

The Forest of Dean – Mammal Special

Naturetrek Tour Report

17th – 18th October 2020

Tour participants – Matt Collis (Leader) with six Naturetrek clients. Report compiled by Matt Collis

Summary

Our tour around the historic Royal Forest of Dean was a fantastic opportunity to fully indulge in autumn, with walks filled with spectacular colours and the opportunity for beautiful wildlife. Despite best efforts, Wild Boar remained elusive all weekend but sightings of Fallow Deer, Badger and Yellow-necked Mice were achieved. Our attempt to see Dormice was unsuccessful too, a reflection of the continuing decline of this struggling species nationwide. The trip was also blessed with several excellent bird sightings including Firecrest, Hawfinch, Goosander and Dipper to name a few.

Day 1

Saturday 17th October

We started our day with an early morning walk around a local section of forest at the back of Speech House. As would be true across all walks on the weekend, the trees were simply stunning; ablaze with ambers and burnt oranges, with each walk the quintessential portrait of an autumn day. While we had no luck with large mammals, a Grey Squirrel eating a Bolete mushroom was joyous as were several of the birds we saw including Goldcrest, Coal Tit, Siskin, Mistle Thrush and Great Spotted Woodpecker.

After breakfast we headed down towards Cannop Ponds for a walk around the pools and into Russell's Enclosure. Recent Boar activity was evident here as much of the picnic area had been turned over, as if furrowed and ready for planting. The pools themselves were slowly filling up with recently returned winter duck including Tufted, Mallard and Wigeon as well as a sweet pair of Little Grebe and the odd gull. A very obliging Dipper was certainly one of the highlights of this walk, choosing to feed in full view for 20 minutes – a rare occasion where we left a bird before it left us! There was also a large congregation of small passerines around the local feeders giving us close views of Chaffinch, Coal Tit and Nuthatch.

Returning to Speech House for lunch, we then took a looped walk from the hotel, eventually ending up at Crabtree Hill where birds were most active. Small flocks of Goldfinch and Linnet periodically took to the air, from tree perches or ground cover, as they feed on the available seed. A lone Redpoll gave prolonged views perched at the top of one tree, as did a Common Buzzard, sheltering from mobs of Crow and Raven which both flew over. Meadow Pipit and Stonechat showed nicely too but the highlights of this walk all came towards its end with a flurry of exciting moments, starting with a Firecrest in amongst Goldcrest moving through some pines.



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This was quickly followed by a mega-flock of some 150-200 Siskin which descended on the copse of Alders right in front of us and finally, the peaceful scene of two Goosander resting on Woorsgreen Lake.

After a well earned dinner, we made the short journey to meet Keith, a local conservationist, whose house was the location of our Badger watch. Arriving at 7pm, we took shelter inside his home and quietly waited whilst Keith shared his intimate knowledge of his local mammals. We didn't have to wait long; the first and only Badger appeared close to 7.30pm, feeding on peanuts for about 20 minutes - plenty of time for the whole group to get fantastic views and a photo of these seldom-seen animals. We gave ourselves another 40 minutes or so but without any additional sightings, so we decided to head off back towards the hotel following an action packed day.

Day 2

Sunday 18th October

Today's early morning adventure saw us scouring the roadsides for Boar and Deer. After checking the activity hotspots noted from the day before, we decided to head towards Parkend, watching and listening from the village green. Although there were no sightings at this point, the deep barks of male Fallow Deer could be heard from close by. Bird activity was good too with Redwing, Song Thrush and a variety of small birds all feeding in nearby trees. A tantalising view of a Hawfinch added some additional adrenaline but unfortunately it didn't stick around, heading south over the adjacent forest. Returning to the hotel, we were finally rewarded with good views of Fallow Deer, a particularly clumsy male standing in the road, before slowly melting into cover.

Following breakfast it was back to Keith's house, this time in search of Dormice. Keith introduced us to the species and a summary of his local findings which hadn't been good in recent years, mirroring national declines. We headed off on a box round, checking 50 boxes as part of an official national survey scheme, more in hope than expectation of seeing a Dormouse. It wasn't long before our first box with a nest, a Wood Mouse, but no individual inside this tatty collection of mixed leaves. A few boxes later, we had our first of two Yellow-necked Mice, a fairly uncommon encounter and a new species to most on the trip. After having a taste of Keith's finger, each was allowed to run off into the cover of stone wall and wood stumps. We finished the round of 50 boxes without a Dormouse but not without a smile, somewhat compensated by the encounter with the Yellow-necks, another infrequently seen small mammal, and a better understanding of this type of survey work.

Refuelled with lunch at Speech House, we headed out for one final walk, this time to RSPB Nagshead, in the hope we might finally encounter some Wild Boar or maybe more Deer. Despite opting to take the longer looped walk as far as the fringes of Coalway, alas the trip was destined to remain Boar-less. The sighting of a Treecreeper, several Jays and a small flock of Crossbill overhead added new avian diversity and once again, we were blown away by the sheer beauty of the autumn colours on this mixed reserve.

With our time up and the light beginning to fade, it was time to return to the hotel to say our goodbyes following a wonderful weekend filled with stunning walks and autumnal wildlife.

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Species List

Mammals

	Common name	Scientific name	October 2020	
			17	18
1	European Badger	<i>Meles meles</i>	✓	
2	Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>		✓
3	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>		✓
4	Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>	✓	✓
5	Yellow-necked Mouse	<i>Apodemus flavicollis</i>		✓

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

	Common name	Scientific name	October 2020	
			17	18
1	Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓	
2	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓	
3	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	
4	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	✓	
5	Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>	2	
6	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	
7	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	✓	
8	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	
9	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	

	Common name	Scientific name	October 2020	
			17	18
10	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		✓
11	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	
12	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	
13	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	
14	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	
15	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓
16	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia domestica</i>	✓	✓
17	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	✓	
18	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓
19	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	
20	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	H	
21	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓	
22	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓	✓
23	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓
24	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓
25	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓
26	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	
27	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	✓	✓
28	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓
29	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓
30	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	✓	✓
31	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	✓	
32	Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>	1	
33	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓
34	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	✓	
35	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>		✓
36	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	
37	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓
38	Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	✓	
39	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓
40	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	✓	✓
41	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓
42	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>	✓	
43	White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>	1	
44	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	
45	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓
46	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	✓	
47	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba yarrellii</i>	✓	
48	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	✓	
49	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	October 2020	
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50	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>		1
51	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	✓	
52	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓	
53	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	
54	Common Redpoll	<i>Acanthis flammea</i>	✓	
55	Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	✓	✓
56	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓
57	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>	✓	✓