

Wild New Forest

✦ Guided Tours ✧

December 2024 Newsletter

A Stormy Season

As I write this, we are in the throes of Storm Darragh, which rides hot on the heels of Storm Bert in late November, bringing a deluge of precipitation to the area. Although it may not seem so at times, the New Forest copes remarkably well with wet weather. As one of the most intact wetland networks in Western Europe, the valley mires come into their own, absorbing and holding excess water. Meanwhile, the myriad of streamways quickly drains water into the main rivers—such as the Beaulieu, Lymington, and Avon—that flow through the southern New Forest into the Solent. It is always amazing how quickly these waters expand and then recede, often in just a matter of hours.

However, the increasing frequency of winter storms, as a result of climate change poses a new challenge to this delicate balance. While the valley mires act as natural sponges and the streams efficiently channel excess water, these systems are not invincible. Over time, the relentless barrage of heavy rainfall and strong winds can lead to cumulative effects that stress the ecosystem in unexpected ways.

Winter storms are part of the natural cycle in forests, contributing to biodiversity and habitat creation. In the New Forest, fallen trees provide important habitats for fungi, invertebrates, and birds. Deadwood nourishes the soil and supports species, which thrive in decaying timber.

However, while occasional storms can be beneficial, an increase in their frequency and severity may disrupt this balance, challenging the resilience of the New Forest ecosystem. Strong winds can uproot ancient trees or snap branches, altering the structure of the forest. This impact is magnified when winds come from the east or north. Trees in the New Forest are naturally braced against the prevailing south-westerly winds and are more vulnerable when gales arrive from less common directions. While storm-damaged areas create opportunities for new growth, excessive tree loss could reduce the forest's ability to sequester carbon and provide shelter for wildlife. Combined with grazing pressures from our burgeoning deer population and other non-native species such as the Grey Squirrel restricting regeneration of our woodlands.



Heavy rainfall associated with storms can wash away nutrient-rich topsoil, this erosion hinders plant regeneration and impacts water quality in nearby rivers and streams. Increased rainfall could also waterlog soils, particularly affecting trees like beech that prefer well-drained conditions. Waterlogging weakens root systems and makes trees more susceptible to being uprooted during subsequent storms.

Climate change is amplifying the frequency and intensity of storms, with potential implications for the New Forest. To ensure the New Forest remains a resilient ecosystem. Reverting stream that were straightened historically to their original meandering course to help slow down water flow and increase capacity is just one important step towards future proofing the New Forest against climate change. We can also play our part by treating our waterways with the respect they deserve, keeping disturbance to a minimum and ensuring we minimise potential contaminants whether chemicals from the pet trade, from our roadways or agricultural land entering our water courses food web.

What to Look For Over the Next Few Weeks

If this mild and wet weather continues as forecast, we might get a second flush of fungi across the Forest, just lately we have been experiencing a new growth of some amanitas, boletes and russulas. Classic winter species should also be more visible across the Forest including attractive fungi such as Scarlet Elfcup, Yellow Brain, Jelly Ear and Winter Polypore.

The wet weather creates ideal conditions for fruiting slimemould so it is worth keeping an eye on those dark and damp corners of our woodland for these often subtly beautiful species. Now we have had a good blast from storm Darragh, the last of the leaves should now out of the canopy in our woodlands. This is great time to go looking at lichens growing in mature woodland.

Finally, one of my favourite spectacles at this time of year is the Starling murmuration, we are lucky to have a few locations around the fringes of the Forest that can pull in large numbers of Starling, from the reedbeds at Lyminton and Keyhaven to the mass roost at Blashford or Lower Test. Though as a self-pronounced roost geek I also enjoy the small gatherings. Just last week I got back to my car in a central New Forest carpark where in a small group of conifer was a roost for around 300 Starling that were making a racket. I sat and watched them as the light dropped, constantly bickering over who got the best central spot in the roost, they could still be heard bickering once it was fully dark!



Images: Great Northern Diver, Dewdrop Bonnet & White-tailed Eagle © Wild New Forest GT, Nov 2024



Wildlife Explorers Club

November was another active month for the Wildlife Explorers Club, even though the weather did force us to cancel the much look forward to Hawfinch roost walk (we will have a new date soon!).

The latest Wildlife Explorers Club newsletter has just been published and can be found on our website at ...

The club is open to all youngsters aged 10-18 and is free to join thanks to sponsorship from The New Forest Trust and NFDC. Details, and application form for the club can be found on our website [here](#).

The Young Explorers Club is made possible thanks to funding and support from the following organisations:



We are delighted to announce that Naturetrek have kindly agreed to sponsor the Young Explorers Club through 2025 enabling us to carry on running events through the year. In addition, they will be sponsoring the Young Persons Wildlife Camp at Cameron's Cottage. We shortly publish the list of events planned for 2025 and look forward to building a working relationship with Naturetrek. As some of you may know, Marcus also leads tours for Naturetrek, please take a look at their website.

November walk highlights

Despite some periods of unsettled and very wet weather, November was a busy month with 13 scheduled walks, five boat trips, three bespoke walks and four illustrated talks. Fungi was very much a theme again this month which continued to produced some good records.

As always the Beaulieu River trips were productive with White-tailed Eagle seen on most outings along with a good mix of raptors with regular Goshawk, Marsh Harrier, Red Kite and Peregrine also seen. One of my favourite trips is the new Extended River trip which includes a stop at the Royal Southampton Sailing Club affording great views along the river and over nearby Gins Marsh. What better than to sit with coffee and bacon roll while watching hunting Marsh Harrier before heading back out on the river!

November fieldwork

November is a quiet time for fieldwork, the main focus this month has been on monitoring Hawfinch roosts and surveying for nocturnal waders in the southern New Forest.

The Hawfinch roosts continue to be quiet with the lack of natural food in the food no doubt forcing Hawfinch out of the Forest and into the wider countryside. Nocturnal fieldwork was also rather slow this month due to a mix of weather, mood and tides not quite combining at the right time but we did manage to get out to all of our study sites during the course of the month recording and mapping Woodcock, Snipe and Jack Snipe feeding sites.

A lot of time at this time of year is spend behind the screen report writing, which is I keep telling myself just as important as the fieldwork but I can spend more than a couple of days out of the field before I start getting itchy feet!



Images: Red-breasted Merganser, Inkcap sp, Grey Seal, Oct 2024 © Wild New Forest Guided Tours

Looking ahead

Our 2025 diary has now been launched with events bookable via our website, the new look website is near completion and will hopefully go live from 1st January with a new address (www.wildnewforestguidedtours.co.uk).

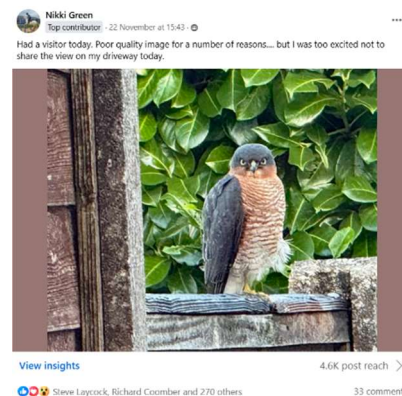
We are busy making plans for the fieldwork season (more in this in the New Year) and will be adding more walks to the schedule as we move into 2025.

Our current schedule of events and access to our booking platform can be reached via our website at <https://www.wildnewforest.co.uk/event-calendar>

Wild New Forest Facebook highlights

The Facebook page continues to grow with fascinating posts on a daily basis; thanks to all contributors that continue to make it such a fascinating resource. Please continue to add context to your photographs, it is always interesting to hear the background to the images and where possible please label photos.

This month's most popular post was the lovely image of a striking adult male Sparrowhawk in beautiful rufous plumage by Niki Green.



Give the Gift of Adventure: Guided Walk Gift Vouchers

Looking for the perfect gift for nature lovers, adventure seekers, or someone who could use a little escape into the great outdoors? Our Guided Walk Gift Vouchers are a thoughtful and unique way to inspire exploration and create unforgettable memories.

Just drop us an email at info@wildnewforest.co.uk for further info.

Reviews

Many thanks to everyone who takes the time to leave a review on TripAdvisor. We are proud to receive the Travellers Choice award for 2024; all our reviews can be found [here](#)



Fabulous Fungi Explorer Experience – posted 20 Nov 2024

A wonderful few hours in the Forest, where beech leaves carpeted the ground.

So many fascinating fungi found by the very knowledgeable Wild New Forest team, who gave us time to take photos. Interesting stories revealed by Marcus about the different fungi. Not just the biology, but also the social aspects e.g. the actions of reindeer herders You need to join a trip to find out what they get up to...

I think I might have to go again too 😊



Upcoming Tours

Beaulieu River Boat Trip		
Sun 5 Jan	0830-1100	
Sun 19 Jan	0800-1100	Extended Trip
Wed 5 Feb	0900-1130	
Sat 22 Feb	1000-1300	Extended Trip
Sat 8 Mar	1100-1330	
Sat 22 Mar	0830-1130	Extended Trip
Sat 5 Apr	1000-1230	
Sun 20 Apr	1000-1200	Extended Trip

Three Hour Birding Walks		
Tue 7 Jan	0900-1200	Coastal Birds
Thur 6 Feb	0900-1200	Goshawk & Woodlark
Tue 25 Mar	0900-1200	Lesser Spotted woodpecker
Sun 6 Mar	0900-1200	Hawfinch

Full Day Birding at the Coast		
Sat 25 Jan	0800-1600	
Sun 16 Feb	0800-1600	
Mon 10 Mar	0800-1600	
Tue 29 Apr	0800-1600	

Hawfinch Roost Walk		
Fri 10 Jan	1400-1600	
Mon 13 Jan	0630-0900	
Mon 20 Jan	1330-1530	
Sun 26 Jan	0630-0900	

Keyhaven Marsh Dusk Explorer Walk		
Sun 5 Jan	1500-1700	
Sat 22 Feb	1530-1730	
Sat 29 Mar	1630-1830	
Sat 26 Apr	1830-2030	

Spring Migration Walk		
Sun 23 Mar	0900-1100	
Fri 28 Mar	0900-1100	
Thur 10 Apr	0900-1100	
Wed 30 Apr	0800-1000	

12 Wildlife walks		
Sat 11 Jan	1100-1400	Harvest Slade Bottom
Sat 1 Feb	1100-1400	Chibden Bottom & Ogdens Purlieu
Sat 29 Mar	1100-1400	Kings Hat & Crab Hat
Sat 5 Apr	1400-1600	Hatch & Sloden

New Forest Wildlife Wander (High Corner Inn)		
Sun 12 Jan	1100-1300	
Sun 9 Feb	1100-1300	
Sun 9 Mar	1100-1300	
Sun 27 Apr	1100-1300	

Monthly Fungi & Slime Mould Walks		
Sun 26 Jan	1200-1400	
Sun 23 Feb	1200-1400	
Sun 23 Mar	1200-1400	
Sat 26 Apr	1200-1400	

Birdwatching class		
Mon 27 Jan	0900-1100	
Mon 10 Feb	0900-1100	
Mon 3 Mar	0900-1100	
Mon 24 Mar	0900-1100	
Mon 7 Apr	0900-1100	

Bird Song Workshop		
Sun 30 Mar	0700-1100	
Mon 21 Apr	0600-1000	

Family Fun in the Forest		
Sun 5 Jan	1300-1500	
Mon 24 Feb	1000-1200	
Sat 1 Mar	1300-1550	

Lyndhurst Discovery Walk (2 hours)		
Most Tuesdays at 1000		Boltons Bench

Lymington Discovery Walk (2 hours)		
Most Fridays at 1000		Bath Road, Lymington

Visit our website at www.wildnewforest.co.uk for further details