

# Wild New Forest

## ✦ Guided Tours ✧

November 2024 Newsletter

### A Tough Winter Ahead

As I write this, I am surrounded by the calls of Redwings, part of the annual influx escaping colder and harsher conditions to the east. While the Redwings make themselves known, forming large groups and scrabbling over our depleted stocks of holly, rowan, and hedgerow berries, a large number of more familiar species will also boost the numbers of resident birds, including Goldcrests, Robins, and Blackbirds—the increase in numbers is palpable. In addition to these regulars, the birdwatching press is full of reports about Hawfinches making their way toward our shores, along with the annual speculation of whether we'll experience a "Waxwing winter" this year.



However, after making the long, arduous journey to our area, many species may be disappointed with what they find here. Following the bumper seed crop of autumn 2023, we're experiencing a notably poor seed crop this year, especially among beech, oak, alder, hornbeam, and ash. To some extent, this is expected; last year's bumper crop has left many of our species depleted of energy and in need of a rest, creating the annual rhythms of the forest.

This year, we face the added complication of a rather poor berry crop, resulting in low volumes of holly and hawthorn in particular, which will impact both seed-eating and berry-eating species. The availability of food directly affects what we can expect to see in the forest. For example, with a poor berry crop, we can anticipate fewer Redwings and Fieldfares remaining in the forest, while our resident Mistle Thrushes and Blackbirds are likely to face a challenging season. The poor seed crop means it's unlikely we'll see many Bramblings, and resident species such as Hawfinches, Greenfinches, and Chaffinches will likely be forced to move out of the forest and into the surrounding countryside in search of food.

Our birdlife is more visible and therefore easier to track, but mammals and invertebrates also feel the impact of seasonal variations. The bumper crop of 2023 led to an increase in small mammals, most notably an abundance of Bank Voles across the forest through 2024. We can reliably predict that their numbers will decrease in 2025, which will have a knock-on effect for our predatory mammals, such as Pine Martens, Stoats, and Weasels. Additionally, we can expect Grey Squirrels to have a tough winter, and Wood Pigeon numbers are likely to decline, potentially impacting the winter survival and breeding success of species like Goshawks in the coming year.

Just as the seed crop affects herbivores and omnivores, the weather influences our insectivores. A mild winter will benefit insectivorous species, but even a short freeze can have a disastrous impact on some species, as seen with the Dartford Warbler during the 1970s and the Lapwing during the "Beast from the East" event in 2017.

While we can predict how difficult the winter might be for some species, many variables can alter their status literally overnight. We can all help by ensuring we don't add to the pressures and stresses experienced by forest species at this time of year, by giving them the space and respect they deserve.

## What to Look For Over the Next Few Weeks

One of my favorite spectacles at this time of year is the annual Wood Pigeon migration. Some years are better than others, but I always find the sight of thousands of pigeons passing overhead awe-inspiring, especially when considering the vast distances they have traveled. At times, the combined rush of air over their wings can be heard from far away. What makes this even more amazing to me is its accessibility; the pigeons pass along the south coast on a broad front and can easily be seen both from migration viewpoints and town centers. I distinctly remember once seeing a flock of around 7,000 pigeons passing over Lymington High Street on a cold, sunny November morning, while the market was in full swing. Not one person appeared to notice the amazing spectacle above their heads—perhaps the only time of year when Wood Pigeons are particularly interesting. I also enjoy watching how agitated our local pigeons get as the migration unfolds, especially when flocks pass at lower altitudes.

Another feature of the season is the mass die-off of certain beetle species, which has been mentioned on the forum recently. Dor beetles, in particular, can often be found wandering aimlessly on New Forest tracks at this time of year as their systems break down. Though dramatic, this process is completely natural and can be seen as a testament to how many beetles made it through the season, avoiding predation, poisoning, and other pressures while hopefully breeding along the way. At this time of year, evidence of this event's significance as a food source can be found in the scats of foxes, badgers, and pine martens.



Images: Osprey, Hare Bell, Elfin Saddle & Merveille-Du-Jour © Wild New Forest GT, Oct 2024



### Wildlife Explorers Club

October was another busy month for the Wildlife Explorers Club with a couple of fun events, starting with a great fungi walk, the youngsters found a great mix of species recording well over 60 species including some crowd pleasers such as the beautiful Parrot Waxcap and a gruesome Scarlet Caterpillar Club that consumes unfortunate caterpillars that have inadvertently digested the spores allowing them to takeover and ultimately kill the insect.

We also teamed up with New Forest Litter Pickers for an event at Bolton's Bench where members of both groups shared their passion for the New Forest over tea and chocolates before venturing out to collect litter. A couple of rubbish bags were filled from the surrounding area, it is a real eye opener how much rubbish is discarded. As to be expected the Wildlife Explorers also found some interesting fungi including a selection of Devil's Fingers and various Waxcaps.

The club is open to all youngsters aged 10-16 and is free to join thanks to sponsorship from The New Forest Trust and NFDC. We have exciting news regarding sponsorship for 2025 coming soon! Application can be found on our website via the following link.

The latest Wildlife Explorers Club newsletter can be found [here](#), 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.

## **Autumn 2025 Wildlife Camp**

October saw our 10<sup>th</sup> Wildlife Camp (seventh at Cameron's Cottage), our biggest attendance with 23 attendees plus three mentors. The camp was a great success, activities included bird ringing, fungi walks, bioblitz, mammal camera trapping, moth trapping, talks and quizzes. A full report will follow soon, we are now pulling together plans for the 2025 camps, watch this space for further details.

## **October walk highlights**



October was a mild month of mixed weather with periods of heavy rain interspersed with settled calm conditions. Fungi was very much the theme of the month with 11 walks at four locations including a couple of extended fungi walks. In addition the two Halloween Walks were well attended,

One of the highlights of the month for me was the Family Fun in the Forest walk over October half term, co-led Jamie Ward and Amy Squire. Both did a sterling job finding and showing the families lots of interesting fungi, flora and invertebrates.

Just one boat trip this month but it was a productive run up the river with some lovely views of Osprey and Peregrine along with the regular wildfowl and waders.

## **October fieldwork**

As we enter the quieter section of the year for fieldwork where focus turns to analysing data and report writing.



The change of clocks at the end of the month marks the start of the dazzling season which sees us out looking at Jack Snipe, Snipe and Woodcock across the southern New Forest and coastal marshes. This winter plan to census the Lymington-Keyhaven reserve for these elusive nocturnal species, where practical ringing individuals measuring fat and muscle scores, checking weights and other biometrics that help us better understand the health of the population and favoured feeding sites. Bird ringing at the coast continues through the winter, albeit at a slower pace.

All Pine Marten trail cameras and tubes have now been retrieved, now begins the analysis of data and planning for the next fieldwork season.

Hawfinch roosts were monitored through the month, with lower than average numbers recorded at most roosts checked, this fits with the general feel out on the Forest, Hawfinch have been elusive so far this autumn. Poor seed crops will be encouraging birds to forage beyond the bounds of the New Forest.

*Images: Dripping Bonnet and Woodcock, Oct 2024 © Wild New Forest Guided Tours*

## Looking ahead

Work continues of our 2025 diary and redevelopment of the website, we plan to confirm details in the next newsletter. The website is slowly taking shape, these things always take longer than planned but we are still on target for launching the new site for Jan 2025 along with a new look newsletter!

As eluded to in the October newsletter we have a number of new and exciting events planned for 2025 including a Birdwatching Class, new workshops, walks and some exciting new boat trips from Bucklers Hard.

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.

As already mentioned, this is a sensitive period so please refrain from posting images of deer at the rut (we do accept images of Red Deer at any time of year) or foraging of fungi.

This month's most popular post was the amazing find of a Palaeolithic Hand Axe by Marion Nesbit. Marion has been a regular contributor for a number of years, we always enjoy here amazing photo's, her time spent in the Forest was justly rewarded with the magnificent find.



## Wild New Forest Vouchers



Wild New Forest Vouchers are available for Walks and Boat Trips and make a perfect Christmas or Birthday gift for that person who is difficult to buy for! Each Voucher can be personalised and can be redeemed at any time with no expiry date. Just drop us an email at [info@wildnewforest.co.uk](mailto: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](#)



### ***Excellent value for money. Time well spent.***

*Efficient, well planned trip. Pick up was punctual as were directions to the meeting point. Marcus and Emily were the perfect pair, one hosted the ten adults and three dogs aboard. Marcus had an extensive knowledge of the wildlife in the area, especially birds, and was happy to explain the bird behaviors. Historical sites were also pointed out but no explanations were labored or too technical. The weather was perfect and I know everybody, including the dogs had a great time. Would thoroughly recommend this trip*

## Follow the New Forest code

The New Forest is a unique place with rare wildlife and free-roaming livestock. Thank you for helping us care for this special place by following the simple New Forest code:

**Be Forest Friendly!**  Scan me to find out more

-  Keep your distance from the animals – don't feed or touch them\*
-  Keep dogs under control. Don't let dogs approach or chase any animals
-  Stick to the permitted cycle tracks
-  Take home litter and dog waste
-  Park only in car parks
-  Drive with care – animals on the road!
-  No fires or barbecues\*
-  No wild camping
-  Help wildlife by keeping to the main tracks

\*Failure to comply may result in a fixed penalty of £100 or being taken to court and a fine of up to £1,000.












newforestnpa.gov.uk thenewforest.co.uk

## Look but please don't pick

Fungi are essential to the New Forest National Park's ecosystem, which is why we're asking you not to pick fungi from this special place.

Please leave fungi alone as they might be very important to us.

Edible forest fungi are only allowed with permission from Forestry England. This guidance applies to all fungi.

**NO PICKING!**

Thank you for helping us to protect the New Forest's fungi.

Commercial collecting of fungi is not allowed. If you suspect or see commercial fungi picking please call the Forestry England on 0300 067 0000.

forestryengland.uk/new-forest

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