

Tour Report UK – Wildlife of the Forest of Dean & Wye Valley 2 – 5 May 2023

Shrill carder bee



Wood warbler



Bank vole



Mandarin duck



Compiled by Barry Embling

Day 1: New Fancy and RSPB Nagshead**Tuesday 2 May 2023***Weather: mixed cloudy and sunny a light southerly wind 16° C*

We all met at the Speech House Hotel and promptly headed the short distance to the car park at New Fancy. From here we climbed to the viewpoint and enjoyed the vista, seeing buzzards and a raven. We then started our walk and saw a garden warbler briefly and heard mostly more common woodland birds. Crossing the road, we re-entered the woodland and could hear a distant trilling that gave away the presence of a wood warbler. We homed-in on the song and eventually spent some time with this most gorgeous of leaf warblers in perfect conditions. This lone male bird was flycatching and eventually landed in the lower canopy close to us. Afterwards we headed to the outskirts of the village of Parkend and explored some oak woodland. We were able to see willow warbler and tree pipit, and heard a redstart, though the latter was not seen. By far the most unusual of wildlife sightings was pair of bank voles that allowed superb and unique photographic opportunities, and were very much enjoyed by all. A great first field session, and our tour was well and truly underway.

Day 2: Nagshead**Wednesday 3 May 2023***Weather: light cloud, cool easterly breeze 17° C*

We made an early start in Parkend, and proceeded to walk up into RSPB Nagshead in beautiful morning sunlight. On hearing pied flycatchers we investigated, and saw both a male and female well – a great start to our day. As we arrived at the Lower Hide, we saw another pair of pied flycatchers clearly using a nearby nest box and our first a pair of mandarin ducks perched on a tree. Observing from the hide, we saw a stunning pair of redstarts by the pond, tail-quivering and looking magnificent. Another more distant pair of pied flycatchers was seen from here as well – a most satisfactory hide session. We then headed for the old Nagshead Nursery, where we saw a garden warbler and a blackcap – and were able to compare the song, only to be flummoxed by a blackcap confusingly mimicking a garden warbler! We went back for breakfast, and had a quick look by the cricket pitch in Parkend on the way back, in case there were hawfinches – but not today.

After a hearty breakfast, it was back out to Woorgreen Lake and the Crabtree Hill grazing project. On the way to the lake we had a good look at large hornbeams growing out of a wood bank. The lake itself was quiet, with both breeding Canada and greylag geese and a few mallards. A raven was seen, and as we neared some open habitats we started hearing, but not seeing at first, tree pipits. A good walk in perfect sunny weather produced views of linnets and goldfinches and at last we got to see a tree pipit with its characteristic parachuting display flight. At the site of Crabtree Cottage, we observed a male redstart and spotted its potential nesting cavity. On the walk back to the van we heard a firecrest, which we couldn't locate.

Next stop was Wenchoford for lunch. Whilst we didn't see many birds, we did spot a nuthatch nest with its dried mud entrance. From here we drove via Blackpool Bridge to the scenic Soundley Ponds. We started in the car park with a coffee, where the barista-guide encountered technical shortcomings and got covered in coffee. Nevertheless, most difficulties were overcome and after refreshments we took a walk around the ponds themselves. A male grey wagtail showed itself well. Some botanising followed and we bravely collected specimens from the waterside. Looking at liverworts led to looking at a water shrew that some of us saw for two periods of around five seconds. Buoyed-up by our good fortune (after yesterday's bank vole), we headed back to the van, then the hotel for a good break before dinner, while the guide cleaned up all the evidence of the coffee mishap.

After our earlier dinner, we headed back into the Forest of Dean near Cinderford. Wild boar was the species we were all hoping to see. However our mammal purple patch continued with four fox cubs being spotted unexpectedly, and seen well by all. Later we saw fallow deer, a muntjac, and then a wild boar sow with tan-coloured piglets. Whilst we didn't have great views of the boar, we all now had seen this species - which is what we hoped for.

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Day 3: Newport Wetlands Poor's Allotment Symond's Yat Rock**Thursday 4 May 2023**

Weather: mixed cloudy and sunny with a gusty medium wind from the south 16° C

A quick dash across the border and we were in Wales - starting our day at Goldcliff Lagoons - a contrast to the last two days in our woodland world. Our main birds here were going to be waders and warblers. On the lagoons themselves we were treated to eight ruff and three (including two summer-plumaged) black-tailed godwit on migration, breeding lapwings plus young, breeding avocets (though none on the nest), and lots of redshank. Walking between the hides we were all delighted to see whitethroat and lesser whitethroat together with chiffchaff, all to a backdrop of singing skylarks. From here we moved to the main Newport Wetlands for a coffee and walked around the reedbeds, seeing reed bunting and hearing many Cetti's warblers. Moving on to Wintour's Leap for lunch and views over the River Wye, with looked at the plants that included rue-leaved saxifrage. Nearby Poor's Allotment was our next stop, exploring this heathland site, dominated by western gorse, we saw a family party of stonechat and two yellowhammers, the latter increasingly hard to see locally. Our final destination was Symond's Yat Rock, with its stunning views and passing flying birds, often below us. Unfortunately we didn't see the famous breeding peregrines, but we enjoyed many passing birds, including buzzards and saw goosanders below on the River Wye.

Day 4: Highnam Woods**Friday 5 May 2023**

Weather: mixed cloudy and sunny a light southerly wind 17° C

Our last local area to visit was the Severn Vale and the RSPB's Highnam Woods looking for nightingale. Exploring the trackways and enjoying such plants as the local and rare Tintern spurge, we also spotted many woodland birds, but unfortunately didn't manage to connect with any nightingales. We heard a pair of marsh tits and met the resident artists who were hosting nightingale and music events. On our walk back to the entrance we finally heard a nightingale close to us and savoured its rich song, however viewing is always difficult for this species, and although we were close with our many prying eyes, we just couldn't see it! Satisfied with this wonderful audio sensation, we headed to Cannop Pond for a coffee and our last venue of the trip. The birds feeders gave good views of siskin, nuthatch and mandarin ducks. Thus ended a full and enjoyable four days based in the centre of the Forest of Dean with much of the local wildlife seen well and a few laughs along the way.

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Checklist



	Common Name	Scientific Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
	BIRDS	<i>AVES</i>				
1	Canada goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		✓	✓	✓
2	Greylag goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		✓	✓	✓
3	Mute swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>			✓	✓
4	Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>			✓	
5	Mandarin	<i>Aix galericulata</i>		✓		✓
6	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>			✓	
7	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓	✓	✓
8	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>			✓	
9	Tufted duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>			✓	
10	Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>			✓	
11	Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>			✓	
12	Little grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>			✓	
13	Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>			✓	
14	Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			✓	
15	Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>				
16	Red kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>			✓	
17	Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓	
18	Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		✓	✓	✓
19	Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			✓	✓
20	Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>		✓		
21	Black-tailed godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>			✓	
22	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>			✓	
23	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>			✓	
24	Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>			✓	

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25	Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avocetta</i>			✓	
26	Black-headed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>		✓		
27	Herring gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>			✓	
28	Lesser black-backed gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>			✓	
29	Stock dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		✓		
30	Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
31	Collared dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>			✓	
32	Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>			✓	
33	Great spotted woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓	✓	H	✓
34	Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>			✓	
35	Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		✓	✓	
36	Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		✓	✓	
37	Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>			✓	
38	Carrion crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
39	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓	✓	
40	Coal tit	<i>Pariparus ater</i>	✓	✓		
41	Marsh tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>			H	
42	Blue tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
43	Great tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓		✓
44	Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>			✓	
45	Sand martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>			✓	
46	Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
47	House martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
48	Long-tailed tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	
49	Willow warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
50	Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
51	Wood warbler	<i>Phylloscopus sibilatrix</i>	✓			
52	Reed warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>			H	
53	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓

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54	Garden warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>		✓		✓
55	Lesser whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>			✓	
56	Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>		✓	✓	
57	Cetti's warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>			✓	
58	Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>		H		
59	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>				
60	Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓	H	
61	Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
62	Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	H	H		
63	Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		✓	✓	
64	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
65	Song thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
66	Mistle thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		H		
67	Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>				H
68	Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
69	Pied flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>		✓		
70	Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	✓	✓		
71	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>			✓	
72	Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i> <i>subsp. leucorhoa</i>			✓	
73	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓		✓
74	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
75	Grey wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>		✓		✓
76	Pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
77	Tree pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	✓	✓		
78	Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓		
79	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>		H		
80	Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓	H		
81	Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>		✓	✓	

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82	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>			✓	
83	Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>			✓	✓
84	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>			✓	
85	Reed bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>			✓	

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