

Wild New Forest

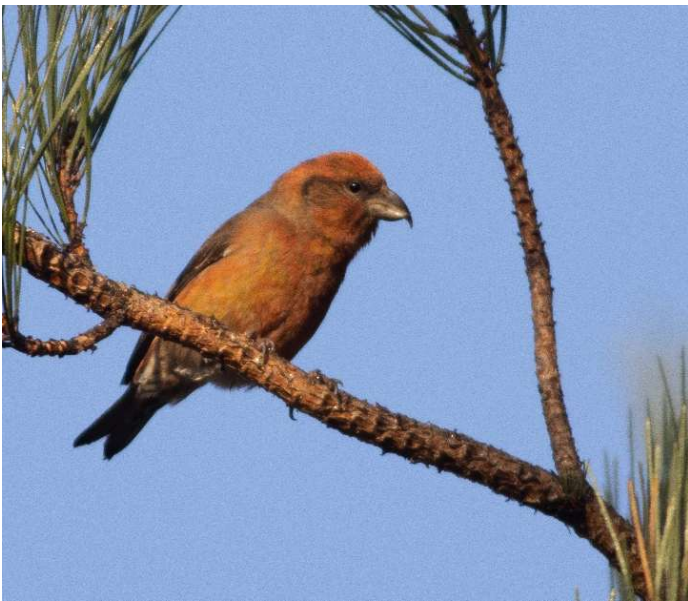
✦ Guided Tours ✧

February 2025 Newsletter

Although in this period of unsettled weather, when spring can still seem quite a long way off, there are clues all around us that the Forest is beginning to stir. As the days get longer and the first signs of life emerge, there's a noticeable change in the air. Today, I'm writing this on one of those rare, glorious blue-sky days where the warmth of the sun can be felt on the face. In the distance, I can hear the familiar songs of Great Tits and Mistle Thrushes, their melodies carrying on the crisp air. There's that refreshing, earthy scent that heralds the coming season, and it stirs a hopeful anticipation for what lies ahead.

February is one of those months when we can be lulled into thinking that warmer, brighter days are just around the corner. In reality, the sting of winter can still catch us off guard, and this unpredictability can have a profound impact on our wildlife. A cold snap at this time of year is especially dangerous, as many species are struggling to survive the harsh conditions. Natural food sources are at their lowest ebb, and survival becomes a daily challenge. With the longer days, many animals are pushing through the final stretch of winter, but that last hurdle can sometimes be the hardest.

For some of our larger mammals, this period is particularly challenging. Cold weather limits vegetation growth, making it harder for herbivores to find enough nutritious food. This is when we can see some damage from browsing animals. Deer are often at their most visible at this time of year due to the lack of cover, and it's a joy to see them out and about, still carrying their impressive antlers. They'll continue to hold on to them for another couple of months.



Some birds are already starting to nest; Crossbills, for instance, may already have nests, and in many cases, the fledglings are ready to take flight even before the month is over. This early breeding strategy is often a response to the abundant cone crop that's available in the late winter months, which provides essential food for the young birds. At the same time, Ravens are becoming much more active around their nest sites. Their distinctive calls echo through the Forest, as these intelligent and adaptable birds establish and defend their nests. Ravens are known for their elaborate courtship displays and their role in the ecosystem as scavengers. Their presence, along with other early breeders, is a sign that the natural rhythms of the Forest are slowly shifting toward the promise of spring.

As we move further into February, it's important to remember that while the days may be getting longer, nature is still very much in the grip of winter's challenges. A cold snap or sudden freeze can still set back many species, but the resilience of the New Forest's wildlife is evident. Whether it's the Deer enduring the lean months or the early breeders forging ahead, there is life thriving in the harshest of conditions.

Image: Common Crossbill, Woodfidley © Wild New Forest Guided Tours

What to Look for Over the Next Few Weeks

These lovely calm and sunny days of February can be a great time to be out and about in the New Forest, especially if you are out early enough in the day when you might be lucky enough to hear singing Woodlark high over the heath or the 'machine gun' drumming of a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker in our woodlands. For me these are real signs of spring. Keeping an eye on the sky might reveal displaying Goshawk or Buzzard while some species such as Tawny Owl, Raven and Crossbill will be well underway producing the next generation.

Sticking with birds, at the coast, wildfowl will be on the move with Brent Geese preparing for their long journey north. Other species will be engaged in elaborate displays as they build those pair bonds that will carry them through the season ahead. It's not all birds - invertebrates start stirring on milder days, and on warm sunny days we should see our first butterflies and bees of the year stirring out of a long winter of slumber, while Minotaur Beetles and Wolf Spiders should be found on the Forest floor. If you happen to be out at dawn or dusk on a warm February day, keep an eye for Pipistrelle bats (either Common or Soprano) taking advantage of small insects on the wing in sheltered spots in wooded areas.

Toads will be on the move this month, returning to traditional breeding ponds to spawn, often moving at night. Keep an eye out in the roads as they undertake their arduous journey back. This month should also see some of our reptiles emerge motivated by the longer, warmer days. Keep an eye on sunspots but please give them plenty of space at this vulnerable time of year.



Images: Dartford Warbler, Velvet Toughshank, Goosander and Red-necked Grebe below © Wild New Forest GT, Jan 2025



Wildlife Explorers Club

The year started with a Hawfinch roost walk which provided some great views of Hawfinch coming into roost at dusk, along with some good views of Crossbill. We also had a thoroughly enjoyable, if a little cold, birdwatching walk at Normandy Marsh. The walk produced a great mix of birds including Red-necked and Slavonian Grebe, Spoonbills and some great views of Peregrine Falcon and Spotted Redshank which conveniently posed along with Greenshank and Common Redshank for comparison!

The latest Wildlife Explorers Club newsletter has been published and can be found on our website at <https://www.wildnewforestguidedtours.co.uk/blog>

The club is open to all youngsters aged 10-18 and is free to join thanks to sponsorship from Naturetrek and Love the Forest. 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:



January Walk Highlights

January saw our first of a new series of 12 Wild Walks, this month walking up to one of my favourite spots in the Forest, Soarley Beeches and Harvest Slade Bottom. It was a lovely walk with lots of great wildlife and scenery along the way, the highlight for me being some perfect Pine Marten prints left in a patch of snow on a fallen beech tree. Also popular in January were our first Hawfinch roost walks of the year which produced good views of Hawfinch along with a few other highlights including Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Goshawk and Crossbill.

January Fieldwork

As with December, the main focus in January was the monitoring of Hawfinch roosts and nocturnal wader surveys. During the month, Hawfinch roosts were monitored at 11 locations with counts of up to 33 Hawfinch. In addition, we ran nine sessions surveying nocturnal waders in the south of the Forest and nearby coast producing some healthy counts of Woodcock and Snipe along with smaller numbers of Jack Snipe.

We have a reduced number of Pine Marten trail cameras in the field at this time of year. Cameras were checked but no Pine Marten were recorded this month. Four bird ringing sessions took place at the coast producing a good mix of species.

The regular WeBS counts and Egret roost monitoring continued and we have started a more thorough fungi survey adding to fieldwork started over the past couple years, monitoring the abundance of common species in three transects in the north of the New Forest.



Images: Hawfinch at roost, Red-belted Bracket and Knot & Dunlin, Jan 2025 © Wild New Forest Guided Tours

Looking Ahead

We have added two new walks looking at seasonal flora, scheduled for early May, covering woodland, heathland and mire; we should experience a good mix of classic New Forest Spring flora. In addition, we have recently listed a new series of Sunset Boat trips on the Beaulieu River, timed to get some of the most wonderful sunsets over some of the beautiful scenery of the river.

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

Pine Marten Talk

In May, we are delighted that Pine Marten expert Johnny Birks will be joining us in the New Forest for a few days of fieldwork. While he is here, we have organised a talk, scheduled for 14th May, at Lyndhurst Community Centre. Johnny will be discussing Pine Martens in the UK, and we will also provide an update on the survey in the New Forest, including the latest findings. Tickets for the event are £3 each and can be ordered at <https://www.wildnewforestguidedtours.co.uk/event-details/pine-marten-in-the-uk-and-new-forest>.



2025 in 2025

The 2025 in 2025 challenge is well underway, Jamie and Marcus managed to record just short of 300 species in January while going about fieldwork or guided walks, the total includes exactly 100 bird species, 53 fungi species and 100 combined tree and flora species. This puts us well ahead for the year but February is likely to be a tougher month!

Wild New Forest Facebook Highlights

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

The most popular post this month was the excellent clip and images of a White-tailed Eagle captured by Mandy Pidge on 20th Jan.

Mandy Pidge
Top contributor · 20 January at 17:49 · 🌐
Just ever so slightly excited today to see this Eagle while out riding on the forest, it totally ignored my friend and I
Absolutely buzzing that's twice in a week! But my friend managed to get a photo and video on her phone today 🐾



View insights

👤👤👤 Steve Laycock, Rob Farnworth and 250 others

2.5K post reach >

35 comments

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](#)

Fantastic guided walk – posted 22 Jan 2025

Enjoyed a truly lovely afternoon with Marcus and a small group searching for hawfinch in the New Forest. Marcus' knowledge of both hawfinch and the forests flora and fauna generally is extensive and he is generous and engaging in sharing his experience. Several hawfinch spotted and a couple of crossbill as a bonus! Hidden forest trails, fantastic views, deer and parachute fungi all added to a rewarding trip. I would recommend to anyone interested in the forest/birds/nature and ecology to book a trip with Wild New Forest, you won't find a better guide. Thank you Marcus!



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.



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thenewforest.co.uk



Upcoming Tours

Beaulieu River Boat 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
Sat 3 May	0900-1130	
Sat 17 May	0800-1100	Extended Trip

Three Hour Birding Walks

Thur 6 Feb	0900-1200	Goshawk & Woodlark
Tue 25 Mar	0900-1200	Lesser Spotted woodpecker
Sun 6 Apr	0900-1200	Hawfinch
Sun 11 May	0900-1200	Dartford Warbler

Full Day Birding at the Coast

Sun 16 Feb	0800-1600	
Mon 10 Mar	0800-1600	
Tue 29 Apr	0800-1600	
Tue 13 May	0800-1600	

Hawfinch Roost Walk

Fri 7 Feb	1430-1630	
Fri 21 Feb	1500-1700	
Sun 23 Feb	0630-0830	
Sun 9 Mar	0600-0800	

Keyhaven Marsh Dusk Explorer Walk

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	

Lyndhurst Discovery Walk (2 hours)

Most Tuesdays at 1000	Boltons Bench	
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12 Wildlife walks

Sat 29 Mar	1100-1400	Kings Hat & Crab Hat
Sat 5 Apr	1100-1400	Gritnam & Brinken Wood
Sat 10 May	1100-1400	Holly Hatch & Sloden

New Forest Wildlife Wander (High Corner Inn)

Sun 9 Feb	1100-1300	
Sun 9 Mar	1100-1300	
Sun 27 Apr	1100-1300	
Sun 18 May	1100-1300	

Monthly Fungi & Slime Mould Walks

Sun 23 Feb	1200-1400	
Sun 23 Mar	1200-1400	
Sat 26 Apr	1200-1400	
Sun 4 May	1200-1400	

Birdwatching class

Mon 10 Feb	0900-1100	Freshwater - Blashford Lakes
Mon 3 Mar	0900-1100	Woodland - Acres Down
Mon 24 Mar	0900-1100	Heathland - Telegraph Hill
Mon 7 Apr	0900-1100	Bird Song - Acres Down
Mon 12 May	0900-1100	Bird Ringing - tbc

Bird Song Workshop

Sun 30 Mar	0700-1100	
Mon 21 Apr	0600-1000	

Flora Explorer Walk

Thur 8 May	1000-1200	
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Butterfly Explorer Walk

Thur 29 May	1000-1200	
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Family Fun in the Forest

Mon 24 Feb	1000-1200	
Sat 1 Mar	1300-1550	
Thur 29 May	1300-1550	

Lymington Discovery Walk (2 hours)

Most Fridays at 1000	Bath Road, Lymington	
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Visit our website at www.wildnewforest.co.uk for further details