

The New Forest Whisper

The Newsletter of Wild New Forest Guided Tours

July 2026

Having written the previous newsletter in late May, when overnight temperatures were still dropping into single figures, I am writing this edition during a prolonged spell of hot weather that follows a series of heat-waves, including one that brought a red weather warning here in the New Forest.

As Brits, we are famously never quite happy with the weather, but this current run of exceptionally hot and dry conditions is genuinely a cause for concern. Only today I was out with our Wildlife Explorers group and entomologist Paul Brock, searching for specialist solitary bees. We eventually found one of the target species, although the rather weary-looking bellflowers they were visiting were a clear reminder of just how dry the countryside has become.

The heat and lack of rainfall are influencing the behaviour of wildlife across the Forest. Access to water becomes increasingly important, and here we are fortunate to have the New Forest's remarkable network of valley mires. One of the New Forest's greatest natural assets during periods of hot weather is its network of ancient valley mires. Fed by groundwater, springs and rainfall, these internationally important wetlands act like giant natural sponges, slowly releasing water into streams and surrounding habitats long after the rain has stopped. While many smaller pools begin to dry out, the mires continue to provide vital moisture for an extraordinary range of wildlife.

The saturated peat and groundwater slowly seeping through these wetlands create cooler, more humid conditions than the surrounding heathland. On a scorching summer's day, the mires often feel noticeably cooler, and wildlife instinctively takes advantage of these natural refuges. Dragonflies patrol the pools, birds visit to bathe and drink, mammals seek out reliable sources of water, and countless insects depend upon these damp habitats throughout the summer.

Despite the challenging weather, it has been a remarkable spring, particularly for butterfly and moth enthusiasts. A prolonged period of southerly airflow during late May brought an extraordinary arrival of migrant butterflies and moths to our shores, many originating from North Africa and the Mediterranean. The numbers involved have been exceptional, with record counts recorded for several scarce moth species, while the influx of Painted Lady butterflies has been one of the largest seen for many years.



Many Painted Ladies are still with us, taking full advantage of the bramble now coming into flower across the New Forest. At the time of writing, they remain one of the commonest butterflies to be seen, providing a welcome splash of colour despite the dry conditions.

So, what caused this remarkable influx of butterflies and moths? As is often the case, it was the result of a perfect combination of events. A wetter-than-average winter across parts of North Africa produced abundant vegetation, allowing many migrant species to breed successfully. This was followed by a much drier spring, as vegetation began to die back and food became scarcer, encouraging insects to disperse in search of fresh resources. At exactly the right time, persistent southerly winds provided ideal conditions for many of these insects to travel north across Europe and eventually reach Britain.

Image: Striped Hawkmoth, Everton, Lymington, June 2026 © Wild New Forest Guided Tours

Although the numbers arriving on our shores have been spectacular, they represent only a fraction of the insects involved in this vast migration. Many will have settled elsewhere across Europe, while countless others will have perished during the journey. Countries across western Europe have also experienced exceptional numbers of species such as Painted Lady and Clouded Yellow. When you consider the scale of the migration, involving many millions of insects moving north across an entire continent, it is one of nature's most extraordinary annual events.



Images: Mediterranean Gull, Common Seal, Honey Buzzard & Puss Moth © Wild New Forest GT, May & June 2026

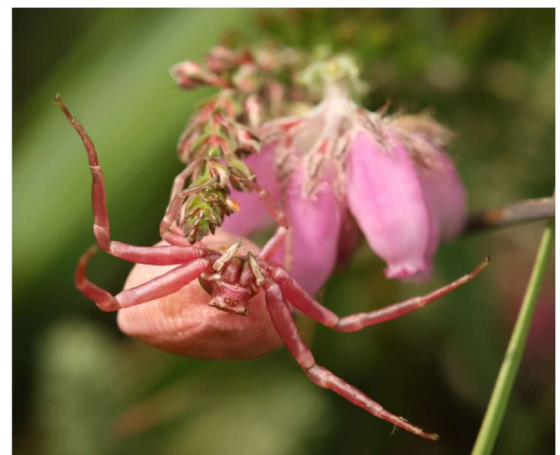
What to see over the next few weeks

July and early August can seem like a quieter time for birdlife across the New Forest, but it is actually one of my favourite times of year. There is always a real sense of anticipation as the first returning waders begin their journey south, stopping off at our wetlands to rest and refuel. Just this week we have been seeing small numbers of Whimbrel, Greenshank and Green Sandpiper at coastal locations, heralding the start of autumn migration.

At this time of year, it genuinely feels as though anything could turn up anywhere. Every visit to the coast brings the possibility of an unexpected arrival, and that's part of what makes birdwatching so exciting. While you're there, many of our local seabird colonies will also be at their busiest, with noisy youngsters fledging and spending their first few weeks learning the skills they need to survive independently.

As mentioned earlier, butterflies and moths are another real highlight of the summer, with an incredible abundance of species taking advantage of the warm weather. One of my favourite places to spend time is along the woodland rides. Flowering bramble is a magnet for wildlife, attracting not only numerous butterflies but also a variety of bees, wasps and hoverflies. There is always something to watch and, if you stop for a few minutes, you will often notice species you initially walked straight past.

However, my favourite habitat to explore has to be the heathland—not least for the stunning transformation as it turns into shades of pink and purple. As the heather begins to flower during July, the heath comes alive with nectaring insects, patrolling dragonflies, basking reptiles and a wonderful variety of beetles and butterflies. One of my favourite species to look for is the Barbie-pink Heather Crab Spider, perfectly camouflaged amongst the flowers. Hiding in plain sight, it waits patiently for an unsuspecting insect to visit the heather. It may look cute, but it is a remarkably efficient predator.





Wildlife Explorers Club

Our Wildlife Explorers have had another busy and enjoyable month out in the New Forest. We carried out our monthly moth survey at Wilverley, and although only a small number of species were recorded, it was still a valuable evening, giving members the opportunity to learn more about moth identification, recording techniques and the importance of long-term monitoring.

We also enjoyed our annual Beaulieu River boat trip, exploring one of the New Forest's most beautiful waterways. Along the way, members learned about the fascinating history of the river, its importance for wildlife, and the variety of bird species that call the estuary and surrounding habitats home.

A particular highlight of the month was welcoming renowned entomologist Paul Brock, who kindly joined our Wildlife Explorers for a fascinating morning. Paul shared his incredible knowledge and experience, talking about both his lifetime of entomological work and his current research in the New Forest searching for the nationally scarce Shining Guest Ant (*Formicoxenus nitidulus*). This tiny ant, which lives within the nests of wood ants, is one of Britain's rarest insects and one of the New Forest's hidden wildlife treasures. It was a fantastic opportunity for our young naturalists to learn from one of the country's leading experts.

With the summer holidays now upon us, we have plenty of exciting Wildlife Explorers events to look forward to, including field surveys, wildlife walks, practical conservation activities and the chance to discover even more of the incredible wildlife the New Forest has to offer.

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:



May and June Walk Highlights

One of the highlights of this time of year has to be our Nightjar walks. No matter how many I see, I am always excited to spend time around these remarkable birds. There is nothing quite like being out on the heath at dusk, when it often feels as though you have the whole Forest to yourself. Recent walks have provided fantastic views of Nightjars hawking around the group, along with regular sightings of roding Woodcock and drumming Common Snipe. Before settling down to watch the Nightjars, we also enjoy a gentle walk, where recent highlights have included Dartford Warbler, Hawfinch and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker.

Our day trips continue to grow in popularity and, as mentioned below, we now have a minibus for our excursions. Recent destinations have included Martin Down and the Somerset Levels. Martin Down lived up to its reputation, with wonderful views of Corn Bunting and the gentle purring of Turtle Doves, while Ham Wall provided the unforgettable spectacle of thousands of Four-spotted Chasers alongside excellent views of the once-rare Green-eyed Hawker (formerly known as the Norfolk Hawker), all against a backdrop of booming Bitterns and showy Common Cranes.

The Beaulieu River wildlife cruises also remain a firm favourite, consistently producing an excellent variety of wildlife. Over the past month alone we have recorded ten species of raptor, along with early returning mi-

grant waders, Common and Grey Seals and, of course, the ever-entertaining Oystercatchers, whose seemingly endless squabbles never fail to raise a smile! This month's cruise across to Newtown Harbour on the Isle of Wight provided a delightful mix of wildlife, together with the opportunity to enjoy a leisurely walk around the picturesque hamlet of Newtown.

May & June Fieldwork

The Hawfinch RAS, along with the main fieldwork season, came to a close at the end of June, at least until the roosts become more active again later in the autumn. Overall, it has been an excellent season for Hawfinches in the New Forest, with large numbers of juveniles fledging across the Forest. It appears to have been one of the most productive breeding seasons since the survey began in 2011.

In the short term, the outlook is encouraging. Beech, holly and rowan all appear to be carrying healthy crops, which should provide an important food source through the winter months. Hopefully the current spell of hot, dry weather will not persist for too much longer, allowing these crops to continue developing successfully.

Elsewhere, the Pine Marten study continues to gather momentum. This month we have received several valuable sightings and, sadly, recovered one road casualty. Our road crossing study has also produced one particularly heart-stopping video, showing a Pine Marten following a stream before being forced onto the road to avoid passing through deep water beneath a bridge. Just four seconds after it safely crossed, a car sped past. On this occasion, the Pine Marten was lucky—but the footage serves as a stark reminder of the dangers these animals face as they continue to recolonise the New Forest.

Looking ahead, we are preparing to begin our long-awaited small mammal survey. However, the current hot weather may delay the start by a few weeks, as trapping is unsuitable during periods of high temperatures. We look forward to sharing the results in future newsletters, as the survey should provide a fascinating insight into the composition and distribution of the New Forest's small mammal community.



New Forest Ringing Group

One of my favourite pieces of fieldwork each year is the annual colour-ringing of tern chicks. We receive some fascinating recoveries that generate a wealth of information about their movements and survival.

It has been a mixed breeding season for the terns along the coast, with an almost complete failure for the Little Terns, while both Common and Sandwich Terns have produced a good number of juveniles. Due to the erratic nature of the season this year, our ringing totals are slightly lower than usual, with 30 Sandwich Terns and 11 Common Terns colour-ringed to date.

We continue to receive some remarkable recoveries, including Sandwich Terns that have spent the past couple of winters in Namibia. One of these birds was recently recorded at Dawlish Warren, Devon, alongside a recently fledged juvenile, having presumably bred nearby.

Other interesting re-sightings have included a Nightjar that we recaptured in the northern New Forest, exactly one year to the day after it had originally been ringed as a juvenile in precisely the same location. It is always fascinating to witness such strong site fidelity.



Elsewhere, the Hawfinch RAS was wrapped up at the end of June. We still have a considerable amount of trail camera footage to process but, as in previous years, several Hawfinch ringed during earlier seasons have

returned to visit the study site. Overall, ringing effort was slightly reduced this year due to a number of other commitments, but we still finished the season with around 30 new Hawfinch ringed (24 at the main study site), including several juveniles.

The CES continues at the coast, although it is still a little early to draw any firm conclusions about the breeding season. However, we have recently been processing large numbers of juvenile tits and warblers, particularly Whitethroat, Chiffchaff and Reed Warbler, suggesting that it has been a productive breeding season locally, at least.

Finally, some exciting news, one of our young trainees, Jamie Ward has progressed to gain his C permit making him the youngest licensed bird ringer in the UK at the age of 16 – we all look forward to seeing his progression onwards. Well done Jamie!

Image: Colour-ringed Little Tern (T6J) fishing at Normandy Lagoon © Wild New Forest Guided Tours

Upcoming Events

Thanks to the generous investment of family members, we are delighted to announce that Wild New Forest Guided Tours now has its own minibus. This means we can take groups of up to six guests in comfort on full-day wildlife trips around the New Forest and further afield.

We have already added dates for some of our most popular excursions, including the Somerset Levels Starling Murmuration, Portland & Weymouth, Poole Harbour, and the all-day New Forest Safari, exploring the Forest's key habitats in a single day. We have also added trips to Martin Down, along with half-day fungi tours that visit two or three different habitats to showcase the incredible diversity of fungi across the New Forest.

Our new minibus allows us to collect guests from a small number of central locations within the New Forest, from your home (if you live within the New Forest), or from convenient pick-up points along the route.



Several exciting new trips will be added to the programme shortly, including our *Beavers and Buntings* day trip and an afternoon and evening excursion to Devon in search of Cirl Buntings, coastal wildlife, before finishing with an evening visit to a reliable Beaver site in East Devon. We are also putting together our first multi-day tour to experience the spectacular wader gatherings at Snettisham and explore the renowned reserves of the North Norfolk coast.

Closer to home, our Fungi Explorer Walks are now firmly in the diary and are already proving popular, with more dates to be added in due course. We have also introduced a new *Beginners Birdwatching Walk*, designed specifically for those new to the hobby. These relaxed and friendly sessions cover everything from bird identification and fieldcraft to choosing binoculars, telescopes and other useful equipment.

Images: WNFGT minibus & Beaver © Wild New Forest Guided Tours June 2026

Beaulieu River Boat Tour	Newtown Harbour	Wild Wilverley Walk
26th July - 1400-1630	20th July - 1600-2000 Lymington	12th Aug - 1000-1200
4th Aug - 0830-1100	16th Aug - 1400-1800	6th Sept - 1300-1500
7th Aug - 1100-1330	Birdwatching for beginners	20th Oct - 1000-1200
23rd Aug - 1400-1630	9th Aug - 0900-1100	13th Nov - 1300-1500
3rd Sept - 0800-1100	Photographic Workshop	Hatchet Pond Wild Walk & Picnic
5th Sept - 1030-1300	29th Aug - 1000-1400 - Coastal Birds	15th Aug - 1000-1300
4th Oct - 1100-1330	1st Nov - 1000-1400 - Fungi	18th Aug - 1100-1400
31st Oct - 0800-1100	Discover Nature: Family Adventure	Coastal Bird Walk
Sunset River Cruise	27th July - 1000-1200	17th July - 1700-1900
31st July 1830-2030	31st July - 1200-1400	9th Aug - 1300-1500
27th Aug - 1730-1930	11th Aug - 1400-1600	11th Sept - 1700-1900
Woodland Bird Walk	17th Aug - 1300-1500	Three-Hour Birding
10th Aug - 0700-0900	From Forest to Sea: Lymington Wildlife Walk	28th Aug - 0800-1100
25th Sept - 0900-1100	1st Aug - 1100-1300	5th Sept - 1300-1600
Halloween Walk	9th Sept 1000-1200	2nd Oct - 1200-1500
30th Oct - 1500-1700	5th Oct - 1000-1200	8th Nov - 1200-1500
31st Oct - 1500-1700	11th Nov - 1000-1200	

Heart of the Forest Wildlife Walk: Lyndhurst	Nightjar Discovery walks	Bird Ringing Demo
19th Aug - 1000-1200	7th Aug - 1930-2230	19th July - 0800-11-00
11th Sept - 1000-1200	1st Aug - 2000-2300	17th Aug - 0800-11-00
21st Oct - 1400-1600	14th Aug - 2000-2300	6th Sept - 0800-11-00
6th Nov - 1000-1200	18th Aug - 2000-2300	14th Nov - 0800-11-00
Wildlife of the Open Forest: Hampton Ridge	Twelve Wild Walks	Wildlife Discovery Walk
19th Aug - 1400-1600	2nd Aug - 1200-1500	11th Aug - 1000-1200
9th Sept - 1400-1600	14th Sept - 1500-1800	13th Sept - 1300-1500
5th Oct - 1400-1600	30th Oct - 1200-1500	10th Oct - 1000-1200
11th Nov - 1400-1600	28th Nov - 1300-1600	15th Nov - 1300-1500
Portland and Weymouth Wetlands Day Trip	New Forest Wildlife Safari	Slimbridge WWT & Somerset Levels Day Trip
10th Sep - 0700-1600	25th Aug - 0830-1630	12th Nov - 0700-1600
Somerset Levels Day Trip	24th Sept - 0830-1630	
16th Nov - 0700-1600	19th Nov - 0830-1630	
17th Dec - 0700-1600	19th Dec - 0830-1630	

Fungi Tours				
Culverley	Eyeworth Pond	Boltons Bench	Millyford Bridge	Rufus Stone
4th Oct - 1430-1630	18th Oct - 1300-1500	28th Oct - 1000-1200	2nd Oct - 0900-1100	31st Oct - 1200-1400
7th Nov - 1000-1200	5th Nov - 1100-1300	8th Nov - 0900-1199	20th Nov - 1200-1400	28th Nov - 0900-1100

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:

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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