

# Wild New Forest

## ✦ Guided Tours ✧

November 2025 Newsletter

As I write this, we're fresh back from another wonderful Wildlife Camp — two days spent at the inspiring Cameron's Cottage in the heart of RSPB Franchises Lodge, surrounded by the sounds of rutting Fallow Deer and the sights of autumn fungi carpeting the woodland floor. It was, once again, an uplifting weekend that reminded me how fortunate we are in the New Forest to have so many passionate and knowledgeable young naturalists.

The weekend was packed full of wildlife activities: early-morning bird ringing sessions produced beautiful Firecrests and good numbers of Lesser Redpoll, while our trail cameras captured new footage of a Pine Marten moving through the woodland. We explored the fascinating world of fungi, recording an impressive range of species, including the weird and wonderful Stinkhorn Fungus to the beautiful and delicate Fluted Bird's Nest. A bioblitz, moth trapping, and some fantastic wildlife career talks from our own Tommy Saunders and Andy Tucker from Naturetrek rounded off a busy and rewarding programme.



But as always, the real highlight wasn't any single activity — it was the energy and enthusiasm of the group. Watching the youngsters gather around field guides, debating tricky identifications, or sharing hints and tips with each other was genuinely inspiring. Their passion, cooperation, and curiosity remind me exactly why these camps are so valuable — and why the future of wildlife conservation is in safe hands.

Our Wildlife Explorers continue to grow as a community of young people who care deeply about the New Forest and its wildlife. Many started attending our camps or guided walks as early teens and have gone on to volunteer with us, contribute to surveys, and even pursue ecology-related studies and careers. What's perhaps most rewarding is seeing the older participants mentoring the younger ones — passing on their skills and enthusiasm in exactly the same way they once received it.

Even if you don't have children yourself, their work benefits everyone who loves the Forest. These young naturalists are the next generation of field ecologists, rangers, and conservationists who will help protect the landscapes, species, and traditions that make the New Forest so special. They're already making a difference: from contributing to bird ringing data that informs national research to discovering new fungi and helping us monitor elusive species like Pine Marten and Hawfinch.

There's something incredibly hopeful about spending time with people who see the natural world with such wonder and determination. In a time when many young people are increasingly disconnected from nature, our Wildlife Explorers stand out as proof that curiosity and care for the environment are alive and well.

As we head into winter, we'll continue to run fieldwork sessions, wildlife walks, and more opportunities for young people — and anyone with an interest in nature — to get involved. Whether it's helping survey waders on the coast, learning about fungi in the woods, or simply sharing a walk through the Forest, every event adds another thread to the tapestry of local conservation.

The future of the New Forest's wildlife really does depend on engagement at all ages — and it's hard not to feel optimistic when you see it in action.

## What to Look for Over the Next Few Weeks

It's been an excellent season for fungi across the New Forest, and as long as November remains mild and damp, it should continue to be productive. In particular, it has been a strong year for Boletes, Bonnets, and some of the regular star species such as Fly Agaric, Porcelain Fungus, and Devil's Fingers. Over the next few weeks, some of the later-season species should start to appear, including the Funnels and some of the more unusual Chanterelles — it will be interesting to see how things shape up.

Early signs suggest we're in for a good finch winter, with flocks of Brambling already building across the Forest and Crossbills remaining a regular feature of any walk in conifer areas. One of my favourite finches, the diminutive Lesser Redpoll, is also present in good numbers; we've been picking up chattering flocks in areas of birch and larch across the Forest. Redwing and Fieldfare numbers have been slow to build, but with such a heavy berry crop there's plenty of food available. Keep an eye on feeding flocks of Redwing — Hawfinch are often nearby, following them to take advantage of regurgitated or defecated holly seeds.

At the coast, Spoonbill numbers continue to rise and wildfowl flocks are beginning to settle, with most migrant waders now well on their way south, leaving behind those that will winter here. With luck, this month will bring our first Slavonian Grebe and Great Northern Diver of the year — both species seem to be arriving later with each passing season.

Back on the Forest, a popular Great Grey Shrike has been delighting observers — the first for a couple of years. It's well worth checking other suitable areas too, as there could be others lurking quietly out there. Winter raptors are also beginning to establish their hunting routines, with Merlin and Hen Harrier both frequenting open heathland, where they pursue luckless Meadow Pipits and roosting Snipe.



Images: Spoonbill, Grey Seal, Frosty Bonnet & Dartford Warbler © Wild New Forest GT, Oct 2025



### Wildlife Explorers Club

We met this month for an afternoon walk to watch the annual deer rut. The group enjoyed learning how to tell the different species apart and observing classic rutting behaviour, including parallel walking and a few dramatic clashes. It was a real privilege to witness this wild autumn spectacle and to see the forest come alive with the energy of the season.

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:



## October Walk Highlights

October was a busy month, with events taking us beyond the Forest for the first couple of weeks, so we didn't have quite as many local walks in the diary as usual. However, one of the real highlights for me was the series of fungi walks held at locations across the Forest. As is typical for a fungi walk, we didn't cover a great distance — but what we lacked in miles, we made up for in discoveries! We encountered an excellent array of species, with plenty of variety from week to week.



I particularly enjoyed the Fungi Photographic Workshops, which offered a wonderful opportunity to slow down and really appreciate the beauty of each species. It was great to see participants experimenting with composition and lighting — and the resulting photographs were superb.

Another standout this month was our inaugural day trip to Portland and the Weymouth Wetlands, visiting Portland Bill and the RSPB reserves at Radipole and Lodmoor. The day offered a rich mix of wildlife, including many species rarely encountered in and around the New Forest, and plenty of memorable sightings in spectacular coastal scenery.

## October Fieldwork

October is traditionally a quieter time for fieldwork, but we've been as busy as ever this month. Our main focus has been the monitoring of nocturnal feeding waders, Pine Marten road-crossing points, and communal Hawfinch roosts.

The Nocturnal Feeding Wader Survey is a new project funded by the New Forest Biodiversity Forum and delivered by the New Forest Ringing Group, working alongside colleagues Tommy Saunders, Nigel Jones, and his team. The project aims to identify favoured feeding sites for nocturnal wading birds — chiefly Woodcock, Snipe, and Jack Snipe — by comparing open areas of the New Forest with surrounding pastureland. October saw us out on the heaths and lawns of the central Forest, recording and ringing nocturnal waders, most of which were concentrated around grazing livestock, taking advantage of the invertebrate larvae found in their droppings.



The Pine Marten study, run in collaboration with Forestry England, has also kept us busy. Much of our effort has focused on maintaining trail cameras positioned at key culverts that could act as crossing points. The aim is to better understand how Pine Martens move through the landscape and to explore ways we can minimise the risks they face while dispersing across the Forest.

Meanwhile, our long-running Hawfinch Roost Study is now entering its 15th year. Most roosts are used year-round, but we increase monitoring at this time of year as numbers build and leaf fall makes viewing easier. The early dawn starts don't mix well with nocturnal wader work — but the chance to watch Hawfinch emerging from their roosts at first light makes it all worthwhile!

*Images: Devil's Fingers & Woodcock, Sep 2025 © Wild New Forest Guided Tours*

## Looking Ahead to 2026



We're now pulling together the diary for 2026, and it's shaping up to be another exciting year of wildlife events and guided experiences. Alongside our ever-popular New Forest walks, we'll be adding extra dates for our day trips exploring some of southern England's most inspiring nature reserves, including RSPB Arne, the Somerset Levels, and — for those keen to travel a little further afield — the Forest of Dean and WWT Slimbridge. Each location offers something unique, from wintering wildfowl and waders to ancient woodlands and spectacular raptor encounters.

Closer to home, we'll be continuing our bird ringing demonstrations at Sway Manor, which have proved both fascinating and educational for participants keen to see birds up close and learn about this vital monitoring work. We're also planning a new series of 12 Wild Walks, each exploring a different corner of the New Forest, focusing on seasonal highlights and the wildlife that makes each area special.

Full details of new events will be published soon on our [website](#) and across our social media channels, so do keep an eye out for updates.

As always, our aim is to share the Forest's incredible biodiversity in a way that informs, inspires, and supports its long-term conservation

## **Wild New Forest Evening Talks**

Our series of winter talks continues, based at the Everton Pavillion on the first Saturday of the month from 1900 – tea/coffee and homemade cake are included in the £5 entrance fee:

### **Sat 06 Dec - Lymington-Keyhaven Marsh with Marcus Ward and Pete Durnell**

Discover the wildlife and history of Lymington Marshes with local experts Marcus Ward and Pete Durnell, Site Manager of Normandy Marsh. This engaging evening talk will explore the marsh's rich birdlife, unique habitats, and the conservation challenges it faces today.



### **Sat 03 Jan - A New Forest Wildlife Year with Marcus Ward**

Join Marcus Ward for an illustrated journey through a year of New Forest wildlife. From wintering birds and early spring flowers to summer butterflies and the autumn deer rut, this talk captures the changing seasons and the species that make the New Forest such a special place.

### **Sat 07 Feb Commoning in the New Forest with Marcus Ward and Suzanne Kempe**

Discover the ancient tradition of commoning in the New Forest with Marcus Ward and New Forest Commoner, Suzanne Kempe.

### **Sat 07 Mar Pine Martens in the New Forest with Marcus Ward**

Join Marcus Ward for an evening exploring the return of Pine Martens to the New Forest. Once thought extinct locally, these elusive mammals are making a quiet comeback.

### **Sat 04 Apr WNFGT Projects and Fieldwork with Marcus Ward**

Join Marcus Ward for an evening showcasing the wide range of projects and fieldwork carried out by Wild New Forest Guided Tours.

All events can be booked via our website [here](http://www.wildnewforestguidedtours.co.uk/talks) - [www.wildnewforestguidedtours.co.uk/talks](http://www.wildnewforestguidedtours.co.uk/talks)

## **Wild New Forest Guided Tours Gift Vouchers**

If you're looking for a meaningful Christmas gift, why not give the experience of nature? Our Wild New Forest Gift Vouchers can be used for any of our guided walks, day trips, or special events — from spring birdwatching and summer butterfly walks to fungi forays and winter wildlife cruises.

Vouchers are available in any amount and make a perfect present for friends, family, or anyone who loves the outdoors. Each voucher supports our ongoing conservation and education work here in the New Forest, helping to protect the very wildlife you come to enjoy.

They can be purchased quickly and easily via our website, and we're happy to personalise them with a message if you'd like to make your gift extra special.

[www.wildnewforestguidedtours.co.uk/gift-card](http://www.wildnewforestguidedtours.co.uk/gift-card)

## Wild New Forest Facebook Highlights

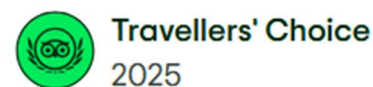
We love seeing your photos, sightings, and stories on our Wild New Forest Facebook page — it's become a vibrant space for celebrating the Forest and its wildlife. To help keep it that way, we kindly ask that you avoid including exact locations for sensitive species and please don't post images of Red Deer or rutting activity. These simple steps really do help us protect the wildlife we all care about.

The most popular post this month was the rather striking escaped Scarlet Ibis photographed on the edge of the Forest on the Test by Clive Bartlett.



## Reviews

Many thanks to everyone who takes the time to leave a review on TripAdvisor. We are again proud to receive the Travellers Choice award for 2025; all our reviews can be found [here](#)



## Photographing Fungi – posted Oct 2025

*What a wonderful experience, learning about the amazing array of fungi in the New Forest and how to photograph them. Fabulous 4 hours which flew by. Will certainly be joining more events.*



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