

The New Forest Whisper

The Newsletter of Wild New Forest Guided Tours

Sep 2026

It has been a tough summer for those who love the New Forest, from the outbreak of equine flu amongst the Forest ponies to the prolonged hot, dry weather and, most recently, the devastating wildfire that swept across the heathland around Backley and towards Bratley.

A great deal has already been written about the fire, so rather than revisit the emergency response, I wanted to look at what it may mean for the wildlife of this internationally important landscape.

The impact on reptiles has been widely reported. The New Forest is one of the few places in Britain where all six of our native reptile species occur, and fire can be devastating for animals caught in its path. Once conditions were safe enough, a specialist team from Forestry England and Amphibian and Reptile Conservation searched the burnt ground for survivors, finding and relocating Common Lizards, Adders and Slow Worms to nearby areas.



Many of the birds using the heath will have finished breeding by August, but not all. Nightjars can still have eggs or young at this stage of the summer and, as ground-nesting birds, any chicks in the path of the fire would have been particularly vulnerable. Late broods of Meadow Pipit, Skylark, Stonechat and Dartford Warbler could also have been affected. Beyond the immediate losses, the disappearance of gorse, heather and insect-rich vegetation removes feeding and sheltering habitat while the heath recovers.

Fire itself is not always entirely negative on heathland. Carefully controlled, cool burns have long formed part of New Forest management, alongside grazing and cutting, helping to create a mosaic of vegetation of different ages. A summer wildfire is very different. Following weeks of exceptionally hot and dry weather, this fire burned with such intensity that it penetrated below the vegetation and into the soil. Forestry England's initial assessment confirmed that more than 100 hectares were affected and that, in places, layers of the seed bank beneath the soil were destroyed. Even boggy areas, normally much more resistant to fire, were burnt.

The fire also reached areas containing ancient beech and oak. These veteran trees support an extraordinary community of fungi, lichens and wood-boring insects, as well as birds and bats. A significant number of ancient trees were destroyed as fire penetrated their root systems which will have a long lasting impact on the landscape.

So where does this leave us? In the immediate aftermath the landscape looked almost apocalyptic, with scorched earth and blackened skeletons of gorse across the burn. Yet nature is remarkably resilient. Following the recent rain, green shoots are already appearing amongst the charred vegetation. Young heath may return relatively quickly in places, but recreating the complex mixture of mature heath, scrub, bog and veteran trees that existed before the fire will take years, and in some areas decades.

The fire has also reignited the debate around rewilding and wildfire. Does allowing nature to take more of the lead simply create more vegetation to burn? The answer is more complicated. If land is simply

abandoned and develops large, continuous stands of dry grass or scrub, fuel loads can increase. But good rewilding is not simply “doing nothing”. Restoring wetlands and natural hydrology can make landscapes wetter, while naturalistic grazing can reduce dense vegetation and create a patchwork of habitats that helps interrupt the spread of fire. In the New Forest, commoning, grazing and carefully targeted management remain vital. Nature recovery and active management do not have to be opposites.

There is also something all of us can do. During periods of high fire risk, avoid barbecues, campfires and any naked flame, make absolutely sure cigarettes are extinguished and take litter home. If you see a fire, move to safety and call 999 immediately, giving an accurate location if possible.

Perhaps the most positive thing we can take from this summer is a reminder of just how precious these habitats are. The Forest will recover, but we can help give it the best chance by reducing avoidable fire risk, supporting thoughtful habitat management and allowing nature the time and space it needs to heal. *Marcus Ward*

What to see over the next few weeks

As I write this, we are experiencing some much-needed rain, hopefully enough to fuel a flush of fungi. As we move into September, we should start seeing mushrooms appearing across the New Forest. In fact, despite the prolonged dry period, you can't help but notice some of our late-summer stalwarts already emerging across the Forest, including a good showing of Chicken of the Woods and Beefsteak Fungus. I even recently came across some very smart Orange Oak Boletes pushing through the ground – hopefully heralding the start of the fungi season.

One of my favourite late-summer sights is the bloom of heather across the New Forest. Although a little subdued this year owing to the dry summer, it is still alive with nectaring insects. This year I have been finding large numbers of Heather Colletes, a solitary bee which can form impressive nesting aggregations, often in warm, sandy banks. On a recent walk we found what can only be described as a veritable city of these fascinating insects, with bees seemingly everywhere you looked.

Ivy is also coming into flower, presenting another opportunity to look for one of our more recent arrivals, the attractive Ivy Bee. First recorded in Britain in 2001, this species has spread rapidly and is now fairly common across the New Forest. Look closely at a sunny patch of flowering ivy over the coming weeks and there is a good chance you may find one.

In the bird world, September is always a highly anticipated month, with autumn migration now in full flow. Yellow Wagtails can often be found feeding around livestock as they make their way south, while Whin-chats, Redstarts and even Pied Flycatchers can turn up at a wide variety of sites across the New Forest.

Along the coast, wader migration will also be well underway, bringing the chance of encountering species passing through on their long journeys south. Seabird passage can add further excitement, with coastal watchpoints offering the possibility of something a little different – perhaps a Black Tern or Arctic Tern amongst the more familiar species. *Marcus Ward*



Images: Mediterranean Gull, White-tailed Eagle, Wasp Spider and Hummingbird Hawkmoth © WNFGT July & Aug 2026



Wildlife Explorers Club

As our Wildlife Explorers Club continues to grow, we were delighted to take the group on their first full-day tour to Martin Down National Nature Reserve.

Martin Down is a beautiful area of unspoilt chalk downland where wildflowers and insects flourish and a wonderful variety of birds can be found. It was a very hot day, but that didn't stop our Explorers from making the most of every wildlife encounter!

During our visit, we recorded more than 20 species of bird, with fantastic views of Yellowhammers, Swallows and Corn Buntings among the highlights. The Explorers also challenged themselves to see how many different butterfly species they could find and identify. By the end of the day, we had recorded an impressive 15 species, including Large White, Gatekeeper, Holly Blue and our favourite of the day, the beautiful Chalk Hill Blue.

One of the biggest highlights was watching a Humming-bird Hawk-moth hovering in front of flowers and feeding with its long proboscis—just like a real hummingbird!

We are now looking forward to this month's Wildlife Explorers event: coastal bird ringing. This will be a fantastic opportunity for the group to see birds safely and carefully in the hand, allowing them to appreciate details that can be difficult to observe in the field. They will also learn more about why birds are ringed and how this important research helps us understand their movements, survival and conservation.

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 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:



Emily-Louise

Walk Highlights

The past couple of months have brought us many wonderful wildlife highlights. From our popular day trips to our local guided tours, each event has delivered its own memorable encounters.

Our Beaulieu River boat tours have once again provided excellent views of both Common and Grey Seals. A few months ago, a distinctively marked Common Seal—also known as a Harbour Seal—appeared on the river. As many of you who follow us on Facebook and Instagram will have seen, we soon noticed that he was carrying a yellow tag on one of his flippers.

We managed to photograph the tag number using a long lens. This allowed us to trace his fascinating history.



He was first rescued by British Divers Marine Life Rescue (BDMLR) at Aldbrough on the East Yorkshire coast on 12th September 2025. At the time, he was seriously underweight, weighing less than 10kg, and was suffering from an umbilical hernia. He was transferred to an RSPCA wildlife hospital in Cheshire, where he underwent surgery, before moving to an RSPCA centre in Norfolk in February for further rehabilitation and eventual release.



We believe he was released somewhere along the Norfolk, Lincolnshire or Yorkshire coast, although sadly we have not yet been able to confirm the exact location or date. Since then, he has made the remarkable journey around the coast to the sunnier shores of Hampshire and the Beaulieu River!

We may yet discover more about his story. Much of the information so far has been pieced together with help from contacts at the Cornish Seal Sanctuary, the Sea Mammal Research Unit and Zeehondencentrum in the Netherlands. Special thanks must go to Tamara at the Cornish Seal Sanctuary for her perseverance in helping us trace his history.

Another highlight has been our series of Nightjar Discovery Tours. Throughout the summer, every event offered memorable encounters with these remarkable birds, including views of them flying and the chance to hear their distinctive churring call.

We now say goodbye to the Nightjars as they begin their long migration to their wintering grounds in sub-Saharan Africa, including countries such as Ghana. We look forward to welcoming them back to the New Forest next May.

Emily-Louise

Fieldwork

Our Pine Marten study, carried out in collaboration with Forestry England, continues to gather momentum. This month, we have received several valuable sightings.

Our road-crossing study has also produced one particularly heart-stopping piece of footage. The video shows 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 crossed safely, a car sped past. On this occasion, the Pine Marten was lucky, but the footage provides a stark reminder of the dangers these animals face as they continue to recolonise the New Forest.

We have also begun our new small-mammal survey, spending 24 hours completing the first of a series of fieldwork sessions using 50 Longworth traps purchased with funding support from **The New Forest Trust**.

This work forms part of our wider Pine Marten project with **Forestry England**. We will compare small-mammal populations in areas with high and low levels of Pine Marten activity, helping us to explore the relationship between predator presence and prey abundance.

The survey also provides an exciting opportunity to improve our understanding of the distribution of the New Forest's different small-mammal species. The last detailed local study dates back to 1949, so there is plenty to learn about how their populations and distributions may have changed.

Each animal is carefully identified, sexed and given a health assessment before being released. Individuals are also temporarily marked, helping us recognise any that are recaptured and allowing us to estimate the local population size.

Our first field session recorded 17 individual Wood Mice and nine individual Bank Voles—a very encouraging start to the project.

At this time of year, we are also busy catching up with the less visible side of our fieldwork: entering records, checking data and completing the all-important post-season paperwork. It may not be quite as exciting as encountering wildlife in the field, but it is essential for turning our observations into meaningful information that can support future conservation work.

Emily-Louise



Image: Bank Vole & Wood Mouse © WNFGT

Upcoming Events

We have recently released a selection of new dates and destinations for our popular wildlife day trips, including a much-anticipated visit to Brownsea Island. This promises to be a wonderful day exploring one of Dorset's best-known wildlife locations and discovering the variety of species that call the island home.

Autumn is also fungi season, and our guided fungi tours are already filling quickly. These walks offer the opportunity to discover the extraordinary diversity of fungi found across the New Forest and learn more about their fascinating role within the woodland ecosystem.

As the evenings draw in, our Hawfinch Roost Walks return, giving us the chance to watch these impressive birds gathering before settling down for the night. We will also be running our popular Halloween tours—perfect for discovering some of the Forest's mysterious nocturnal wildlife after dark.

Alongside these seasonal events, you can still join us for some of our classic New Forest walks, including Wild Wilverley, Heart of the Forest and our walks around Lyndhurst, with plenty more to choose from.

Our popular evening talks at Everton Village Pavilion also return next month, beginning on 10th October with *Moths and Butterflies of the New Forest*. Tickets cost £8 per person, including tea, coffee and cake.

Take a look at our schedule below to discover all our upcoming events—we hope you can join us!

Emily-Louise

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](#)



Travellers' Choice
2025

Wonderful Wild Walk – posted Apr 2026

What a wonderful walk in an area of the New Forest I am not familiar with. Thank you.

Great knowledge between the team about Birds, Insects, Plants and Fungi. A real treat to hear about this unique habitat and its various niches, and to be shown it's all on our doorstep. How lucky.

Spot of the day was seeing a pair of Woodlarks.

A friendly and welcoming, small group of passionate people, I will be joining them on more trips, definitely.

Facebook Reviews

Marcus will always do his best to show you not only what you came to see but lots of other wildlife too. Very knowledgeable not only on wildlife but the history of the forest too. I have recently joined in on a butterfly walk and a nightjar walk, both very successful and enjoyable.



1

I joined the bird ringing session this morning. It was pure soul food - interesting, informative and inspirational. All delivered in a very relaxed and friendly manner.

A big value thank you to Marcus, Emily & Jamie 🐦 🐿

We really enjoyed the Beaulieu River outing, great views, highlights included great views of the white-tailed eagle, a very relaxed seal, so many wading birds...and very welcome home made brownies! Highly recommended.

Wild New Forest
Guided Tours

WNFGT Talk Evenings

Discover the hidden world of the New Forest at
Everton Pavilion

Join wildlife guide Marcus Ward for an engaging evening of stunning photographs, fascinating stories, and expert insight into the wildlife of the New Forest. Perfect for nature lovers, wildlife enthusiasts, and anyone keen to learn more about the natural world.

10TH OCT	Moths and Butterflies	1900 - 2130
7TH NOV	Fungi in the new forest	1900 - 2130
12TH DEC	Winter Wildlife of the New Forest	1900 - 2130
9TH JAN	Hawfinch and Pine Marten update	1900 - 2130
13TH FEB	A year on the Beaulieu River	1900 - 2130
13TH MAR	Wildlife Explorers	1900 - 2130

Tickets: £8 per person
Refreshments: Tea, coffee, and cake included

Book via our website:
wildnewforestguidedtours.co.uk

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.

newforestnpa.gov.uk thenewforest.co.uk

 BOAT TOURS	 WILDLIFE WALKS	 DAY TOURS	 SPECIAL EVENTS
Beaulieu River Boat Tour 4th Oct - 1100-1330 31st Oct - 0800-1100 19th Nov - 1200-1430	Wild Wilverley Walk 20th Oct - 1000-1200 13th Nov - 1300-1500	New Forest Wildlife Safari 24th Sept - 0830-1630 19th Dec - 0830-1630	Photographic Workshop 1st Nov - 1000-1400 - <i>Fungi</i>
Solent Safari 30th Sept - 0900-1500	Wildlife of the Open Forest 5th Oct - 1400-1600 11th Nov - 1400-1600	Portland and Weymouth Wetlands Day 10th Sep - 0700-1600 27th Oct - 0700-1600	Halloween Walk 30th Oct - 1500-1700 31st Oct - 1500-1700
Newtown Harbour 1st Oct - 1300-1700	From Forest to Sea: Lymington 9th Sept 1000-1200 5th Oct - 1000-1200 11th Nov - 1000-1200	Somerset Levels 17th Dec - 0700-1600 3rd Jan - 0700-1600	Bird Ringing Demo 15th Nov - 08:00-11:00
 OTHER TOURS	Twelve Wild Walks 14th Sept - 1500-1800 30th Oct - 1200-1500 28th Nov - 1300-1600	Slimbridge WWT & Somerset Levels 16th Nov - 0700-1600 17th Dec - 0700-1600	Wader ID course 6th Oct - 0800-1200
Woodland Bird Walk 25th Sept - 0900-1100	Heart of the Forest : Lyndhurst 11th Sept - 1000-1200 21st Oct - 1400-1600 6th Nov - 1000-1200	Ashlett Creek and Calshot Wildlife Walk 19th Nov - 0900 19th Dec - 0900	Autumn Explorer Oct 3rd - 1300-1500 Oct 6th - 1400-1600
Wildlife Discovery Walk 13th Sept - 1300-1500 10th Oct - 1000-1200 15th Nov - 1300-1500	3-Hour Birding 2nd Oct - 1200-1500 8th Nov - 1200-1500	Breamore Wood & Down Wildlife Walk 9th Nov - 0830	 WILDLIFE ESCAPE — A MULTI-DAY ADVENTURE —
Hawfinch Roost Walk 13th Nov - 0615-0815 20th Nov - 0630-0830 29th Nov-0645-0845 5th Dec - 0645-0845			Norfolk Birding Adventure 14th-16th Oct - 3 days
			Somerset Levels Winter Wildlife Spectacular 2nd - 4th Dec
 FUNGI TOURS	New Forest Fungi Safari 29th Oct - 0800-1400 9th Nov - 0800-1400	Millyford Bridge 2nd Oct - 0900-1100 20th Nov - 1200-1400	
Culverley 4th Oct - 1430-1630 7th Nov-1000-1200	Boltons Bench 28th Oct - 1000-1200 8th Nov - 0900-1100	Eyeworth Pond 18th Oct - 1300-1500 5th Nov-1100-1300	Rufus Stone 31st Oct - 1200-1400 28th Nov - 0900-1100