

The New Forest Whisper

The Newsletter of Wild New Forest Guided Tours

March & April 2026

Spring has arrived in the New Forest—and with it, one of the busiest and most fascinating times of year. Firstly, apologies for combining the March and April editions of the *New Forest Whisper*. This is a particularly busy period for us at WNFGT as we begin the survey season and make the most of the longer—and hopefully drier—days that mark the transition into spring.

As I write this on a mild, sunny morning in late March, it finally feels as though spring is stirring. Over the past few weeks, I've seen the first Brimstones of the year, heard the bright, repetitive song of Chiffchaffs and the rich warble of Blackcaps, and noticed Lesser Celandines opening to follow the sun across the sky.

Although common and widespread, species such as Lesser Celandine and Common Daisy have far more going on than first meets the eye. Through a remarkable process known as heliotropism, their flowers track the movement of the sun. In periods of overcast or dull weather, Lesser Celandines close, protecting their delicate structures. It never ceases to amaze me—these intricacies of nature, even among species we often overlook or dismiss as weeds, are far more fascinating than we might expect.

Another remarkable phenomenon taking place at this time of year is known as *zugunruhe*—the restless urge that compels migratory birds to begin their long journeys. As I write this, species we eagerly anticipate, such as terns and cuckoos, are on the move northwards, with the first arrivals already beginning to take up residence.

At the same time, on our local marshes, resident wild-fowl and waders are forming new pair bonds or reuniting with established partners. Alongside this comes competition, as birds establish their place within the social hierarchy. The outcome can be critical—determining access to the best feeding areas or the most suitable nesting sites. At this time of year, the hubbub of activity can be heard from a distance as gulls squabble and Ringed Plovers compete. Across the south of the Forest, the distinctive “ya” call of the Mediterranean Gull can be heard, earning it the local nickname of the “Lyminster Gull”.



For a couple of weeks now, I've been hearing the songs of Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs. While we may pause to enjoy their beauty and the calm they bring, it is worth remembering that, for the birds themselves, this is a time of intense pressure. What we hear as birdsong is, in reality, a race against time—each note a declaration of territory and a bid to secure a mate.

The pressures are no less significant for females, who must reach breeding condition and produce eggs at a time when natural food sources can still be limited—particularly for seed-eating species. On two occasions, I have observed what appeared to be a settled Hawfinch on the nest from a distance, only to return a week or two later to find it still in the same position, having died during the nesting attempt. While such instances are rare, they serve as a stark reminder of just how demanding this period can be.

Image: Mediterranean Gull © WNFGT

At this point, it feels timely to offer a gentle annual reminder: this is a challenging and critical time of year for our wildlife—whether birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, or plants. This short window is vital for breeding success, and it is essential that we remain mindful of the pressures wildlife faces.

We are incredibly fortunate to have such a rich diversity of species on our doorstep. With that comes a responsibility—to ensure that we give wildlife the space, peace, and respect it needs during this crucial time.

Spring may feel gentle to us—but for wildlife, it is a season of urgency, effort, and survival.

What to Look for Over the Next Few Weeks

April and May are a time of plenty. As mentioned above, migrant birds will be arriving and passing through en masse, while flora emerges and invertebrates begin to stir.

Among my many favourites, I always look out for the first Hairy Dragonflies of the year. These are typically the earliest of the larger dragonflies to emerge and can be seen patrolling vegetated waterways. They are often quite reliably found along the coastal strip, where, with a little patience, they can be seen perching between forays.

Another species that can be challenging to see well is the Orange-tip butterfly. The males, with their beautiful orange-tipped wings, can be seen patrolling sunny rides and open areas. They are best looked for on cloudier days, when they are more likely to pause from their otherwise constant patrolling as they search for females.

From early April, the number of moths visiting my garden moth trap begins to increase, prompting me to be more moth-aware when out in the field. One of my favourites to find each spring is the impressive Emperor Moth. These are active both by day and by night and can often be seen buzzing low over heathland from mid-April, where their favoured larval food plants—Ling and Bell Heather—are found.



With around 2,500 species recorded in the UK, many of which play an important role as pollinators, moths are a vital part of our ecosystem and act as key indicator species when assessing environmental health.

On the ground, I always enjoy seeing my first flowering Wood Anemone and Wood Sorrel on the forest floor, along with the first Cuckooflower and Greater Stitchwort. It always brings me joy to see colour returning. These staple spring flowers take me back to days spent enjoying the warmth of the sun on my face while watching—or waiting—for nesting Hawfinch—something we often take for granted at the time, but miss deeply during the colder, damper winter months.



Images: Dartford Warbler, Grey Seal, Hawfinch & Little Gull © Wild New Forest GT, Mar and Apr 2026 (Emperor Moth in text, May 2024)



Wildlife Explorers Club

Recent weeks have been filled with plenty of exciting activity. We've recently launched a monthly wildlife survey at Wilverley with our Wildlife Explorers, giving young naturalists the chance to develop their field skills while contributing to real ecological monitoring. It's a fantastic way to build confidence and connect more deeply with the New Forest's wildlife.

We also held a very successful Wildlife Explorers open day, welcoming new faces and giving families a chance to find out more about the club. It was great to see so much enthusiasm, and we're looking forward to seeing many of those attendees joining us on future sessions.

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. Details and an application form can be found on our website.

The Wildlife Explorers Club is made possible thanks to funding and support from the following organisations:



February and March Walk Highlights

The past couple of months have been a busy period, with many highlights. Our ongoing day trips continue to be popular, while locally we have also enjoyed some memorable encounters.

Our first Raptor Watch Walk of the year was a great success, with at least five Goshawks seen very well—at times sparring with each other and even with one of the local Ravens—alongside good views of Common Buzzard, Red Kite, and Sparrowhawk. However, the raptors were nearly overshadowed by a wonderful experience watching three Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers bickering and sparring before we had even left the car park!

We also ran our first birdsong walk of the year, where we focused on woodland birds, getting to grips with some of the trickier species such as Treecreeper and Hawfinch. We also concentrated on New Forest specialities, including Crossbill and Firecrest, and enjoyed the newly arrived Blackcaps and Willow Warblers—getting views of Lesser Spotted Woodpecker along the way.

Among the highlights for me have been the day trips to the Somerset Levels, where we have been getting great views of classic species such as Common Crane and Great White Egret, with a backdrop of booming Bitterns and displaying Great Crested Grebes.

March & April Fieldwork

March marks the start of the intensive fieldwork season. This month, we have re-established the Hawfinch study sites across the Forest. This is our eleventh year of the Hawfinch British Trust for Ornithology RAS project (*Ringed Adults for Survival*), and we have been delighted to begin recording several of the regular individuals at our study sites—birds ringed in previous years. It is always a pleasure to confirm they have made it through another winter.

One of the highlights of the year so far has been the discovery of a new Hawfinch roost in the south-west of the New Forest—our 51st, and the first new site for a couple of years. While not a large roost, it will provide valuable data on the Hawfinch population in that part of the Forest for years to come. It was very much the result of a team effort, and extremely satisfying to finally pin this one down.

We are fortunate to have a fantastic team of volunteers, without whom none of this work would be possible, so I wanted to take a moment to express my appreciation. If you are interested in helping with Hawfinch fieldwork, please do get in touch with us.



Elsewhere, Pine Marten fieldwork has stepped up a gear this month. In addition to ongoing monitoring of road crossing points, we are now also focusing on the collection of hair samples for DNA analysis. So far this year, we have recorded several Pine Martens. At this time of year, they will be giving birth to kits across the New Forest and becoming much more active as a result.

Sadly, we have also had our first record of a road-killed Pine Marten this year. Fortunately, the observer notified us (the message came through just as I was brushing my teeth before bed!), and we were able to respond quickly and recover the body. It was, sadly, an adult female that appears to have recently had kits.

Although a difficult situation, by collecting the body we are able to gather valuable data that would otherwise be very hard to obtain. In this way, we can at least ensure that, in death, she contributes to our understanding and the future conservation of Pine Martens.

New Forest Ringing Group

This has been a fairly quiet period for the ringing group, with our main focus being the Hawfinch RAS project mentioned above. Hawfinch ringing can be slow and time-consuming; so far this season, we have caught and ringed five new birds (and replaced one colour ring that had been lost) in around 20 hours of effort in the hide. So far this year, we have had no bycatch—the method is highly targeted, allowing us to catch only the intended species.

We have accumulated several records of previously ringed Hawfinches via the trail cameras on site. However, while our time is focused on fieldwork at the moment, analysis of these records will be held back until after the main field season.



Elsewhere, we have been working with Jamie, who will be going for his C-permit in the next few weeks, carrying out a couple of sessions at the coast to ensure he is fully prepared for his assessment.

As always, we have a lot of backroom work preparing for the season ahead—making sure all our kit is in order and purchasing the necessary colour rings for what we hope will be a busy seabird season.

Upcoming Events

We will soon be releasing some new dates and locations for our popular day trips, including a much-anticipated day trip to Brownsea Island.

One of my annual highlights is the Seabird Boat Trip that takes us across to the colonies on the south side of the Isle of Wight via the Tern and Gull colonies of the western Solent. This year the trip is scheduled for 18th Jue, heading out from Lymington.

We have also recently added some new dates for our ever popular Nightjar Walks and will soon be adding a new Moth and Butterfly walk, where we look at the contents of the moth trap before heading out on a general butterfly foray!

Wild New Forest Guided Tours 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 02 May Wildlife Explorers Talk Evening

Come along for a special event hosted by our Wildlife Explorers, where young nature enthusiasts will each give short talks on their favourite wildlife topics.

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

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.

Beaulieu River Boat Trip			Bird Ringing At Sway Manor			Heart of the Forest Wildlife Walk: Lyndhurst			Woodland Bird Walk		
May	Thur 14th	0830-1100	May	Mon 18th	0800-1100	May	Thur 28th	1000-1200	May	Wed 27th	1100-1400
July	Sun 11th	1400-1630	June	Mon 1st	0800-1100	June	Tue 23rd	1000-1200	June	Mon 22nd	1200-1400
Aug	Fri 7th	1100-1330	Wildlife of the Open Forest: Hampton Ridge			Spring Migration Walk			Hatchet Pond Wild Walk & Picnic		
Aug	Sun 23rd	1400-1630	May	Tue 26th	1000-1200	May	Fri 1st	0800-1100	June	Sat 20th	1100-1400
Sept	Sat 5th	1030-1300	June	Thu 25th	1000-1200	Twelve Wild Walks			1-Hour Discovery Walk		
Beaulieu River Extended Cruise			New Forest Wildlife wander			May	Mon 3rd	1100-1400	July	Thur 2nd	1200-1300
May	Mon 25th	1230-1530	May	Sat 30th	1200-1400	Jun	Sun 28th	1100-1400	July	Fri 10th	1400-1500
May	Sat 30th	1500-1800	June	Sat 6th	1300-1500	Discover Nature: Family Adventure			From Forest to Sea: Lymington Wildlife Walk		
Sunset River Cruise			Keyhaven Dusk Walks			May	Mon 4th	1200-1400	May	Thur 21st	1000-1200
May	Sun 3rd	1800-2000	Apr	Mon 6th	1800-2000	June	Sat 6th	0900-1100	June	Wed 3rd	1000-1200
June	Sun 21st	1800-2000	Butterfly Explorer Walk			Wild Beginnings: Discover the New Forest			Flora Explorer Walk		
June	Mon 29th	1830-2030	May	Thur 14th	1200-1400	June	Sat 27th	1200-1400	May	Sat 16th	1000-1200
Newtown Harbour & Beaulieu River Tour			June	Thu 4th	0900-1100	Nightjar dusk walks			June	Fri 19th	1000-1200
May	Mon 29th	1100-1500	3-Hour Birding			May	Thurs 21st	1900-2100	Day Tours		
Ile of Wight Seabird Trip			May	Wed 27th	0700-1000	June	Sat 6th	2000-2200	May	Martin Down	Fri 15th - All day
June	Thurs 18th	0730-1500	June	Sun 21st	1400-1700	June	Sat 19th	1930-2130	Jun	Martin Down	Fri 26th - All day
Photographic Workshop (Terns)			Wild Wilverley Walk			July	Sat 18th	2000-2200	Jun	Somerset Levels	Fri 5th - All day
May	Sat 2nd	1000-1400	May	Wed 20th	1000-1200	Aug	Fri 7th	1930-2130			
			June	Tue 2nd	1000-1200						