Wild New Forest Guided Tours

The New Forest Whisper

The Newsletter of Wild New Forest Guided Tours

November 2026

As we move into November, the season finally seems to be changing. Just recently, the night sky has been filled with those lovely Redwing 'seeps' as they arrive unseen into the New Forest. It always amazes me how they settle straight into the area as if they have never been away, despite flying several hundred kilometres to be here.

At the same time, other unseen arrivals join the sedentary locals on our lawns and heaths to pick through pony poo in search of equally well-hidden dung beetle larvae at night. These Woodcock, Snipe and Jack Snipe have potentially travelled several thousand kilometres from the depths of Russia and eastern Europe, escaping Arctic cold weather to feed on our temperate lawns. Many will go unseen by human eyes but will benefit from the unique practice of commoning, ensuring plenty of food, combined with quiet woodland within which they will roost through the all-too-short daylight hours.

The highlight of the year for many is the annual abundance of fungi during what is the peak of their breeding season. No two years are the same, with the annual cycle impacting the abundance of certain species and the effects of the dry summer ensuring that this year's season is starting later than normal. Recent rainfall has enabled a fresh burst of fruiting bodies. A recent trip to an area of lovely ancient pasture woodland produced an array of lovely species. The air literally smelt of mushrooms, the effect of the new growth releasing what will be millions of spores into the air.

What engages me the most is the fact that there is always so much to learn. Just today, I was looking at a small fungus that was growing out of what appeared to be a small yellow sack. A bit of research later, and I discovered I was looking at a Splitpea Shanklet that was growing out of its own sclerotium, which is essentially a food sack produced from mycelium by the fungus itself, enabling it to produce a fruiting body and release spores to produce the next generation. This fungus is known to grow on the decaying remains of other fungi, but also produces its own food store to support growth. With the recent environmental stress caused by this year's drought, resulting in a lack of fungal fruiting bodies, this tiny fungus may be benefiting from the reserves stored within its own sclerotium.



Image: Splitpea Shanklet with its yellow coloured sclerotum © WNFGT

Along with the wintering Woodcock, these amazing processes are happening right before our eyes but largely out of sight unless you go looking for them. Nature is incredible; there is always something to learn if you get inquisitive and look a little deeper.

What to see over the next few weeks

With many of our summer visitors long gone and new arrivals coming in from the north and east, we have recently been recording increasing numbers of Brambling and Redpoll across the Forest's woodlands. Meanwhile, at the coast, the first Brent Geese of the season have been burbling at their regular haunts, where this year's growth of Spartina and other saltmarsh flora will keep them well fed for a while. I always like to look out for family groups with young that can be distinguished by the bars on their closed wings (created by the white tips on their upper wing coverts). It is early days, but so far a good number of juveniles have been recorded among those first groups to arrive. Brent Geese are great parents but can be bullies! Every now and then, a youngster will become separated from its parents and visibly panic as it tries to find its way back to the family, while being pecked and bullied by other members of the flock. It reminds me of that feeling as a child of losing your parents in a crowd!



Of the scarcer species, now is a good time to look for Great Grey Shrike in the New Forest. With up to four wintering last winter, it will be interesting to see how many return this year, while at the coast there is always the chance of a Snow Bunting or group of White-fronted Geese.

Away from the birdlife, I always think the Forest looks at its best at this time of year. Late October and early November see the woodlands full of colour, both in the canopy as the leaves turn and on the Forest floor, which is littered with the many colours, shapes and textures of mushrooms. The air always feels fresher at this time of year, yet it is still mild enough for invertebrates to be active and plentiful.

One of the features of autumn that we get asked about most is the seemingly large number of beetles found dead or dying along woodland rides and pathways. These are largely Dor Beetles, including the Woodland Dor Beetle, a species that thrives in the New Forest thanks to the plentiful supply of dung produced by our commoners' livestock and the sensitive management of the Forest, including restrictions on veterinary treatments that can harm these remarkable insects.

Dor Beetles play a vital role in the Forest's ecosystem, helping to break down dung, recycle nutrients and provide food for other wildlife. Although sad to see, finding dead or dying beetles at this time of year is not necessarily a cause for concern. Natural mortality is part of their life cycle, and some of these beetles may have lived for several years and already contributed to the next generation. They might not be the most glamorous of the Forest's inhabitants, but they are undoubtedly among its unsung heroes!

Image above: Brent Geese, Oct 2026 © WNFGT



Images: White-tailed Eagle, Ruby Bolete, Grey Seal & Yellow-legged Bonnet © WNFGT Oct 2026

Wildlife Explorers Club

We've been pleased to welcome a few new members to the Wildlife Explorers over the past month. It's always lovely to see the group growing and to bring together young people who share an interest in wildlife and the natural world.

One of the highlights has been a visit to the coast to watch bird ringing. The Explorers were able to see the ringing process up close and learn how trained ringers carefully handle birds, fit their rings and record useful information. It was a great opportunity to ask questions and discover how ringing helps us understand bird movements, survival and population changes.

We've also continued with our monthly transect. Walking the same route regularly gives the Explorers the chance to build their identification and observation skills, while recording the wildlife they encounter. Each visit brings something different, and keeping consistent records helps us notice how things change through the seasons.

The Wildlife Explorers Club is open to young people aged 10–18, and membership is free thanks to sponsorship from Naturetrek. You can find more information about the club, along with the application form, on our website here.

We're grateful to the following organisation for their funding and support, which help make the club possible: https://naturetrek.co.uk/

September and October Walk Highlights

Fungi season is well underway, with walks taking place at various locations across the New Forest. There have been plenty of highlights, including some spectacular finds. Particular favourites of mine have been the assortment of boletes that have kept us on our toes, with species such as Ruby and Saffron Bolete seemingly having a great year. We've also enjoyed old favourites such as Holly Parachute and Ear-pick, while real crowd-pleasers have included the abundance of Porcelain Fungus and the wonderful variety of Inkcaps on show.



This month, we ran our first multi-day trip to Norfolk, staying in a very comfortable hotel in Old Hunstanton. We all had an amazing time watching some of Norfolk's specialities, including Shorelark, Snow Bunting and Whooper Swan. However, it was the sheer numbers of birds that really blew us away, from the constant skeins of Pink-footed Geese overhead to the spectacular gatherings of waders at the famous high-tide roost at Snettisham. A truly memorable few days!

Back home in the Forest, species such as Hawfinch and Brambling have featured regularly on our walks, while along the coast we've been delighted to see good numbers of Spoonbills returning to the marshes. We've also been particularly fortunate with sightings of White-tailed Eagle, both along the coast and within the Forest itself, providing some unforgettable moments for our guests.

Upcoming Events

Our autumn fungi walks are still underway, and there's so much to discover in the Forest at this time of year. Places are filling quickly, but we still have some spaces available on our remaining walks.

We're putting the finishing touches to our January–June 2027 diary, which will be out soon. It will include popular walks at Lymington and Keyhaven and around Lyndhurst, alongside plenty of new events and locations. Look out, too, for our Beaulieu River boat trips, where you can enjoy the river's wildlife and scenery from the water.

From two-hour guided walks and boat trips to day outings to Brownsea Island, the Somerset Levels, Slimbridge and Portland and Weymouth, there'll be lots to look forward to. We're also planning longer wildlife adventures, including our multi-day Norfolk trip.

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

September and October Fieldwork

September and October are generally quieter months for fieldwork, but we have still been out and about. Most of our recent activities have been bird-related, with Hawfinch roosts proving particularly active following what has been one of the best breeding seasons for some time.

Our nocturnal wader surveys have started in earnest across the Forest and nearby coast. The bulk of our winter visitors are yet to arrive, but we have already been recording good numbers of Woodcock and Snipe, along with the occasional Jack Snipe on the heaths and lawns. An unexpected bonus was a couple of young Short-eared Owls that spent some time on the coastal marshes, perhaps having been born not too far away!

Migration ringing generally slows down through October, but there are still valuable opportunities for the team to develop their skills and gain experience. Overall, it has been a good season, with Keyhaven once again proving to be both an important stopover site for migrants and a breeding site for a diverse range of species.

Upcoming Fieldwork

Winter is a time for planning, and we are busy beavering away behind the scenes, pulling together plans for next year's Hawfinch and Pine Marten fieldwork, as well as exploring potential new projects. One particularly exciting possibility is a long-overdue comprehensive survey of Tree Pipits across the New Forest.

Of course, we'll still be out in the field, focusing on our Winter Nocturnal Feeding Wader Survey and maintaining our mammal trail cameras, with particular attention being given to Pine Marten road-crossing points. Our Small Mammal Survey has also become a firm favourite and will continue for as long as weather conditions remain suitable.

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


BOAT TOURS
Beaulieu River Boat Tour
19th Nov – 1200-1430
15th Dec – 0800-1030
18th Dec – 0900-1130
WILDLIFE WALKS
From Forest to Sea: Lymington
11th Nov - 1000-1200
Twelve Wild Walks
28th Nov - 1300-1600
3-Hour Birding
8th Nov - 1200-1500
Heart of the Forest : Lyndhurst
6th Nov- 1000-1200
DAY TOURS
New Forest Wildlife Safari
19th Dec - 0830-1630
Somerset Levels
17th Dec - 0700-1600
3rd Jan - 0700-1600
Slimbridge WWT & Somerset Levels
16th Nov - 0700-1600
SPECIAL EVENTS
Bird Ringing Demo
15th Nov - 08:00-11:00
Ashlett Creek and Calshot Wildlife Walk
19th Nov – 0900
19th Dec - 0900
Breamore Wood & Down Wildlife Walk
9th Nov - 0830
Hawfinch Roost Walk
13th Nov - 0615-0815
20th Nov - 0630-0830
29th Nov-0645-0845
5th Dec - 0645-0845
FUNGI TOURS
Millyford Bridge
20th Nov - 1200-1400
Culverley
6th Nov – 1000- 1200
7th Nov-1000-1200
11th Nov – 1400-1600
Wilverley Woodland Fungi Walk
18th Nov – 1000-1400
Boltons Bench
8th Nov - 0900-1100
Eyeworth Pond
5th Nov-1100-1300
5th Nov – 1330 -1530
Puttles Bridge
Nov 28th – 0900-1100
TALKS
Fungi in the New Forest
7th Nov – 1900-2100
A Year on the Beaulieu River
13th Feb - 1900-2100
Winter in the New Forest
19th Dec - 1900-2100
Wildlife Explorers Evening
13th March - 1900-2100
Hawfinch and Pine Marten
9th Jan - 1900-2100
TOUR SCHEDULE 2027 COMING SOON