

Wild New Forest

✦ Guided Tours ✧

May 2025 Newsletter

April has been a month of ups and downs—both personally and out in the field. But among the ebbs and flows, one constant remains: the solace found in observing nature. Amidst life's uncertainties, watching wildlife offers a grounding presence, a reminder of the enduring rhythms of the natural world.

As some of you may have seen on social media or in the press, we were recently affected by the theft of equipment from our Hawfinch study sites. My first instinct was to retreat to what brings me peace—spending quiet time in the Forest, my go-to place for reflection and perspective. At one point, I even considered calling it a day. But the response from the community has been nothing short of overwhelming and deeply heart-warming. I just want to take a moment to say thank you to everyone who reached out with kind words and support. It means far more than I can express here.

In that spirit, I'd like to share a little more about the work we're doing with Hawfinches in the New Forest.

Hawfinch populations have declined dramatically across the UK over the past 40 years, with only an estimated 1,000–1,500 breeding pairs remaining. The New Forest is one of the species' last strongholds, supporting around 350 breeding pairs—and encouragingly, the population here appears stable.

Hawfinches remain poorly understood, largely due to their elusive nature, which makes them difficult to study. We've been researching them in the New Forest for around 15 years, focusing on various aspects of their lifecycle. Our work includes communal roost monitoring, nest observations, foraging studies, diet analysis, colour-ringing, and GPS and radio tagging. One significant gap in our knowledge is post-fledging dispersal. We know Hawfinches are quick nesters, with chicks "branching" (leaving the nest before they can fly) just 7–10 days after hatching. They're also attentive parents—forming communal nurseries that provide a secure environment for their young during the first week or two after fledging.

But what happens after that is still largely a mystery. We know that fledglings don't return to their natal area, but how far do they go? Do siblings stay together as a family group, or do they disperse widely and independently?



The limited data we do have comes from radio-tagged individuals in 2019 and 2021. In those studies, we found that juveniles moved to communal nurseries up to 5 km away from their nest sites within days of fledging. Eventually, they joined communal roosts—at which point the radio tags (attached to the adults) ran out of battery or detached, ending the observation period. Those early findings offered tantalising clues, but many questions remain.

Thanks to advances in technology, we are now able to deploy GPS tags on juveniles—each weighing just 1.2g. With support from the New Forest Biodiversity Forum, we've secured three GPS tags for use this year. Working in collaboration with the RSPB, BTO, and Forestry England, we've secured the necessary permissions to tag three juvenile Hawfinches—no small feat, as the licensing process is rightly rigorous.

Image: Juvenile male Hawfinch, New Forest © Wild New Forest Guided Tours

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The equipment that was stolen—two trail cameras and an automated feeder—was vital to this work. Over years of trial and error, we've learned that Hawfinches, though fussy eaters, have a soft spot for black sunflower seeds. They prefer to shell the seeds themselves and will often ignore pre-shelled ones unless food is scarce. By placing small amounts of seed in favoured feeding spots, we can encourage birds to return consistently to these locations.

There, we use trail cameras with high enough resolution to read colour rings, allowing us to identify individual birds. With cameras placed at a few discreet forest locations, we're able to gather data on movement between sites, site fidelity, social interactions, and even behaviours such as courtship and monogamy within flocks.

What to Look for Over the Next Few Weeks

Late spring is a fantastic time to be out in the field, with classic summer species starting to emerge. On hot, sunny days, water bodies such as Hatchet Pond and Eyeworth Pond come alive with dragonflies. Look out for the stunning green Downy Emerald as it patrols its territory, while smaller damselflies flit over the water's surface, busy mating and foraging.

Out on the heath, Milkwort and Lousewort should be in full flower, with damper areas hosting Sundew and perhaps the first Bog Pimpernel beginning to emerge. Keep an eye out for some of our beautiful orchid species too—Lesser Butterfly and Heath Spotted Orchids may be found in open heathland areas.

At ground level, you might spot the shimmering Heath Goldsmith Beetle or a brilliantly glossy Rose Chafer visiting flowering plants. These striking beetles seem particularly fond of Rowan and Holly blossom at this time of year.

This month should also bring the first sightings of the Silver-studded Blue butterfly on heathland. If you have time, take a moment to marvel at its incredible life cycle, including its fascinating symbiotic relationship with Black Ants—a great reminder of the complexity of the heathland ecosystem.

While on the heath, an evening (or dawn) visit on a warm, calm day might reward you with the soft churring of a Nightjar—freshly returned from its long migration north from sub-Saharan Africa. Ringing studies have shown that these beautifully camouflaged birds return to the same territories year after year, with one female recorded back at Keyhaven for five consecutive seasons.

If you find yourself at the coast, keep an eye out for Terns busily establishing territories, and Avocets aggressively defending their young from any would-be intruders. All signs suggest that this is shaping up to be another successful breeding season on the coast.



Images: Chocolate-Tip, Lapwing & Sand Martin, New Forest © Wild New Forest GT, April 2025



Wildlife Explorers Club

This month we met up at the coast for a bird ringing session. The group had the opportunity to see a variety of bird species up close in the hand, while also enjoying some classic coastal birds. We spent time discussing migration and bird identification, making the most of the chance to observe birds at close quarters and deepen our understanding of their journeys and distinguishing features.

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](#).

Any old birding kit gathering dust at home could make a real difference to our team of young birders. We're particularly looking for binoculars or other optics to help them get out into the field independently. All donations would be warmly welcomed and greatly appreciated.

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



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April Walk Highlights

This month we ran some of our favourite walks which including:

12 Wild Walks event, a gentle wander from the High Corner Inn, taking in parts of Brinken Wood and Gritnam Wood. Wildlife activity was relatively quiet, but the group enjoyed a peaceful walk through some beautiful ancient woodland and took the opportunity to discuss the signs of spring slowly emerging across the landscape.

Our Spring Migration Walk was based at Normandy Marsh, where the group focused on tern species and explored the wider topic of migration. A mix of Sandwich and Common Terns gave good views, and the conversation around the challenges of long-distance travel for these birds sparked plenty of interest.

The Monthly Fungi & Slime Mould Walk delivered a rich variety of species despite the time of year. Highlights included colourful Green Elfcup, the delicate Snowy Disco, and some classic early season fruiting bodies such as Turkey Tail, Bog Beacon, and the striking Beechmast Candle Snuff. A great reminder that there's always something to discover, even outside peak fungal season.

Our Keyhaven Marsh Dusk Explorer Walk provided some lovely views of waders in the fading light. As the sun set, we watched flocks of Dunlin and Redshank moving across the mudflats, with the peaceful atmosphere making for a perfect end to the day.

The New Forest Wildlife Wander this month offered a varied walk through heath and woodland. Although it was a little quiet on the species front, the group enjoyed getting to grips with habitat features and signs of wildlife presence, with a focus on tracks, feeding signs, and birdsong along the way.

Boat trips

Also in April we ran both our Beaulieu River Boat Tour and Extended Cruise, giving us some great sightings along the river and estuary. Highlights included Sandwich Terns diving offshore, Little Egrets feeding along the creeks, and a lingering group of Brent Geese. Raptors were well represented with views of Buzzard, Kestrel, a distant Goshawk, and a hunting Marsh Harrier. We also picked up Redshank, Lapwing, Chiffchaff, Meadow Pipit, and Pied Wagtail.

A lovely mix of birds, scenery, and spring sunshine made for two excellent trips.

April Fieldwork

April is always a busy month for fieldwork, and this year was no exception. Much of our time was focused on Pine Marten and Hawfinch research, with a particularly good number of new Pine Marten records generated. We also conducted several surveys on private land, assessing the establishment of new hedgerows and completing standard baseline ecological assessments.

April also marked the start of the BTO CES (Constant Effort Site) bird ringing survey at Keyhaven Marsh—now in its eighth year. The CES sees us out every ten days throughout the breeding season, building valuable long-term data on breeding bird populations.

Other fieldwork this month included the annual BTO BBS (Breeding Bird Survey) and WeBS (Wetland Bird Survey). Jamie also continued our coverage of the monthly Little Egret roost survey, ensuring continuity for this important local dataset.



We've been colour-ringing Terns on the Lymington–Keyhaven Marshes since 2021 as part of a Solent-wide project, and over the past month we've received several exciting re-sightings. These included Common and Little Terns back on the marsh after being ringed as chicks in 2022, and up to five Sandwich Terns ringed as chicks last summer—now returning after spending their first full summer off the coast of Namibia, some 12,500 km south of their natal site.

Image: Colour-ringed Little Tern, Normandy Marsh, April 2025
© Wild New Forest Guided Tours

Looking Ahead

We're excited to announce that this year's Solent Seabird Cruise will set sail aboard the *Coral Star* of Lymington—a larger vessel equipped with full onboard facilities. Departing from Lymington Quay, we'll embark on a three-hour voyage around the iconic Needles, with the goal of observing the spectacular seabird colonies along the southwest Wight coastline. Expect good views of Common Guillemots, Razorbills, Fulmars, and more, including a visit to the thriving Sandwich Tern colony. We'll also be keeping a lookout for feeding frenzies along the way—always a thrilling and dynamic sight.

To make the experience even more memorable, the trip includes a rustic picnic lunch featuring delicious local produce. This cruise is one of the highlights of our calendar, and we can't wait to welcome you aboard!

We'll also soon be announcing new dates for our ever-popular, newly renamed Monthly Fungi and Flora Walks—so keep an eye on our social media channels for updates.

For the full schedule of upcoming events and to book your place, visit our website:

www.wildnewforestguidedtours.co.uk/event-calendar

Merchandise

By popular request, Wild New Forest Guided Tours has launched a small range of branded merchandise! The collection includes practical notebooks (perfect for jotting down field notes), as well as mugs and T-shirts — ideal for everyday use or as thoughtful gifts for nature enthusiasts.

Browse the full range and order online at:

www.wildnewforestguidedtours.co.uk/products

Reviews

Many thanks to everyone who takes the time to leave a review on TripAdvisor. We are proud to receive the Travellers Choice award for 2024; all our reviews can be found [here](#)



Spring Migration walk – April 2025

“Beautiful walk lasting 3 hours. Marcus and Emily and Jamie are super knowledgeable about the wildlife and also the New Forest in general. A real treat - I will be booking more experiences with them.”



Up coming Tours

Beaulieu River Boat Trip			12 Wild life walks		
Wed 28 May	1700-1930	10 Spaces	Sat 10 May	1100-1400	Holly Hatch & Sloden
Mon 2 June	1000-1230	Full	Sat 28 June	1100-1400	Freeworm s Hill & Anses Wood
Thu 12 June	1700-1930	1 Space	Sat 19 July	1100-1400	Holmsley Ridge & Inclosure
Fri 20 June	1000-1230	1 spaces			
Tue 8 July	1600-1830	8 Spaces	New Forest Wildlife Wander (High Corner Inn)		
Thr 24 July	1700-1930	10 Spaces	Sun 29 June	1100-1300	
Fri 1 Aug	0930-1200	8 Spaces	Sun 13 July	1100-1300	
Sun 17 Aug	1100-1300	10 Spaces			
Mon 18	1200-1400	10 Spaces	Monthly Fungi & Flora Walks		
			Sun 22 June	1200-1400	
Beaulieu River & Newtown Harbour Boat Trip			Sun 27 July	1200-1400	
Fri 13 June	1200-1600	2 spaces			
Fri 15 Aug	0900-1200	7 spaces	Bird watching class		
			Mon 9 Jun	0900-1100	
Sunset River Cruise-Beaulieu River			Mon 23 June	0900-1100	
Mon 7 July	1900-2100	7 spaces	Mon 14 July	0900-1100	
Sun 19 July	1830-2030	10 Spaces			
Sat 2 Aug	1800-2000	5 Spaces	Butterfly Explorer Walk		
Sat 16 Aug	1800-2000	10 Spaces	Thur 29 May	1000-1200	
			Fri 6 June	1100-1300	
Three Hour Birding Walks					
Fri 6 June	1800-2100	Nightjar	Family Fun in the Forest		
Wed 9 July	0900-1200	Raptors	Thur 29 May	1300-1500	
			Sun 8 June	1200-1400	
Full Day Birding at the Coast					
Mon 30 June	0800-1600		Telegraph Hill Dusk Walk		
Sun 20 July	0800-1600		Fri 30 May	1900-2100	
			Sun 22 June	1900-2100	
Keyhaven Marsh Dusk Explorer Walk			Fri 18 July	1930-2030	
29-May	1900-2100				
Sun 8 June	1930-2130		Woodland Bird Walk		
Fri 25 July	1930-2130		Tue 3 June	1030-1230	
Lyndhurst Discovery Walk (2 hours)			Lymington Discovery Walk (2 hours)		
Tue 18 June	1000-1200	Boltons Bench	Fri 18 July	1000-1200	Bath Road, Lymington
Tue 16 July	1000-1200	Boltons Bench	Fri 25 July	1000-1200	Bath Road, Lymington
Hotal Wild Walks			Please note that walk dates and times may be subject to change. Visit our website at www.wildnewforestguidedtours.co.uk for		
Fri 30 May	0900-1200	Family Fun in the Forest - Beaulieu Inn			
Thur 5 June	0700-1000	Birdsong -Beaulieu Inn			
Fri 27 June	0900-1200	Introduction to the New Forest -Beaulieu Inn			