

# Wild New Forest

## ✦ Guided Tours ✧

November 2025 Newsletter

Over the Christmas period, a well-reported and notable influx of Russian White-fronted Geese and Tundra Bean Geese occurred across eastern and southern England, with small numbers recorded along the New Forest coast and on the Forest fringes. These scarce visitors always generate considerable excitement among birdwatchers, and rightly so — both species are true Arctic breeders, travelling vast distances to escape the harshest winter conditions.

While these geese were the headline species, they were just the most visible sign of a broader winter movement affecting many more familiar birds. Over the past few weeks there has been a noticeable increase in common woodland and garden species, particularly Robin and Blackbird. Robins in particular are making their presence loudly known, with birds frequently seen and heard bickering over feeding territories across the Forest. On a recent walk, an impressive total of 33 Robins were recorded along just a couple of kilometres of woodland trail — a striking illustration of how mobile and concentrated wintering birds can become.



Away from the woodland and into the darker hours, surveys on the open heath have revealed increasing numbers of Woodcock, Common Snipe, and Jack Snipe. These nocturnal waders move into the New Forest in greater numbers during winter, taking advantage of the damp lawns, heaths, and grazed areas where invertebrate prey remains accessible even during cold spells. At the same time, winter thrushes — Redwing and Fieldfare in particular — are present in good numbers, actively feeding on the abundant hawthorn and holly berry crop that the Forest has produced this year.

So what has driven this influx? The arrival of Russian White-fronted and Tundra Bean Geese is often a reliable indicator of wider continental movement. Both species breed on the Arctic tundra of northern Russia and typically winter across mainland Europe, particularly in countries such as the Netherlands and Belgium. However, a prolonged spell of freezing conditions across northern Europe in mid-December — driven by sustained northerly and easterly airflows — likely made these traditional wintering grounds increasingly inhospitable.

Frozen ground and snow cover can rapidly limit access to food, forcing birds to continue moving west and south in search of more favourable conditions. The same weather systems that displaced the geese would also have affected many other species, from thrushes and robins to waders, pushing them into areas like southern England where conditions remained comparatively mild.

For the New Forest, this highlights the importance of its varied habitats — woodland, heath, pasture, and coastal marsh — in providing refuge during periods of climatic stress. Winter movements like these serve as a timely reminder that even familiar species are part of a much wider, dynamic system, responding constantly to changes far beyond our shores. For those spending time outdoors over the coming weeks, it's a wonderful opportunity to witness this seasonal drama unfolding all around us.



## What to Look for Over the Next Few Weeks

Mid-winter is a great time to be out and about in the Forest. Sticking with the birds, it is well worth keeping an eye out for Great Grey Shrike — alongside the well-reported bird at Shatterford, a further two or three individuals have been reported across the Forest in recent weeks. Potentially linked to the wider winter influx mentioned above, there also appears to be a good number of Merlin and Hen Harrier frequenting open areas of heath and lawn. Any one of these predatory species is enough to ensure even the dullest winter's day is memorable.

In woodland areas, some of our earliest breeders are already becoming active. Most notable among these are Common Crossbill, which will be busy with courtship and early nesting. The familiar drumming of Great Spotted Woodpecker is also becoming more frequent and, on calm sunny days towards the end of the month, may even be joined by its rarer cousin, the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker.

At the coast, the marshes remain awash with birdlife. Up to 25 Spoonbill have recently been viewable on the Lymington Marshes, alongside a good mix of wintering wildfowl, waders, and grebes — a reminder that mid-winter can still deliver some truly impressive spectacles.

However, it's not all about birds at this time of year. Mid-winter is also an excellent opportunity to slow down and look more closely at the Forest's smaller details. With trees now bare, lichens really come into their own, offering the chance to admire some of the Forest's most intricate and beautiful foliose and fruticose forms. In damper corners of the forest floor, slime moulds can often be found, while a handful of hardy fungi species continue to persist despite the colder conditions.

Mammals can feel quieter in mid-winter, but with reduced ground cover in woodland, deer in particular can actually become easier to spot. With five species present in the Forest, it can be a surprisingly enjoyable challenge to see how many you can record in a single day.



*Images: December Moth, Great Northern Diver, Drumstick Truffleclub & Red Kite © Wild New Forest GT, Dec 2026*

## Wildlife Explorers Club

As the Wildlife Explorers Club continues to grow, we have some exciting plans taking shape for 2026. In December, we met with our Explorers to hear their thoughts and ideas on how they would like the group to develop, and their enthusiasm and ambition have been fantastic to see.

Alongside our regular walks and Explorer sessions, we are planning to introduce full-day trips to inspiring wildlife locations such as **Poole Harbour** and **Martin Down**, giving the group the chance to experience a wider range of habitats and species.

We are also looking forward to our **Wildlife Explorers Talk Evening on May 2nd**, taking place at **Everton Pavilion**. This special evening will give our Explorers the opportunity to share their knowledge, experiences and enthusiasm for wildlife with friends, family and supporters. Tickets cost **£5** and are available via our website.

One of the key things the young people asked for was the opportunity to collect data of genuine ecological value. In response, we are launching a **Wildlife Explorers Survey**, with a monthly survey transect at **Wil-verley Plain**. The group will visit the site regularly to carry out bioblitz-style surveys, focusing on seasonal taxa such as butterflies, fungi, beetles, spiders and other invertebrates. The Explorers will then analyse the data and produce a short report, giving them valuable experience of the less glamorous – but equally important – aspects of ecological work.

The Wildlife Explorers Club is open to all youngsters aged 10–18 and is free to join thanks to sponsorship from **Naturetrek**. [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk)

Full details and the application form can be found on our website.

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



## December Walk Highlights

December is traditionally a quieter month for walks and boat trips, but this year still delivered some memorable highlights. The month saw the first of what we hope will become a regular series of day trips to the Somerset Levels, culminating in the truly impressive spectacle of around 250,000 Starlings swirling into roost — a winter experience that never fails to impress.

Closer to home, we enjoyed a couple of lovely and very productive boat trips along the Beaulieu River, which produced a wide range of species. Highlights included two Great Northern Divers busily diving for crabs on the riverbed, alongside some excellent views of Marsh Harrier. Our final boat trip of the year was made even more special with a festive Christmas dinner at the Royal Southampton Sailing Club, providing a fitting end to the season.



*Images: Spoonbill, Dec 2025 © Wild New Forest Guided Tours*

Other December highlights included a couple of productive Hawfinch roost walks, always an atmospheric way to spend a winter morning or evening, and our second Bird Ringing Demonstration at Sway Manor. These events not only allow us to explain the ringing scheme and highlight the valuable data collected, but also give guests the rare opportunity to see birds safely in the hand. Species recorded included Firecrest, Goldcrest, Redwing, and Nuthatch, alongside plenty of familiar favourites such as tits, Robins, and Dunnocks.

## December Fieldwork

December was a fairly busy month for fieldwork, the Nocturnal Feeding Wader Survey was in full swing with visits surveying areas on lawn/heath in the New Forest and adjacent private pasture/grazing land. The reust to date are proving quite interesting with good concentrations of Woodcock in particular on open areas of heath scrub on crown land, often observed through the thermal imager forging for larvae in manure, highlight the importance of stock on the open forest for both resident and visiting nocturnal waders. At the coast the scene is similar but with a broader mix of waders, it is fascinating to see how areas and pathways that are often busy



with people during the day are taken over by wildlife at night – for example we find a lot of foraging Ringed Plover feeding along the fringes of pathways at the coast.

Other fieldwork this month has included the ongoing monitoring of Hawfinch roost sites and Pine Marten fieldwork, in collaboration with Forestry England with a focus on road crossing points, this is part of a long running study that we hope will bring a greater understanding of both Pine Marten in the New Forest but also help mitigate for road traffic accidents with mammals on the Forests road network.

## Looking Ahead

We have recently added a few new Hawfinch roost walk dates along with a few extra day trips dates to the Somerset Levels and Portland & Weymouth Wetlands along with some New Forest Wildlife Safai's.

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.

## Wild New Forest GT 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 21 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 Facebook Highlights

Some of you will have noticed a recent change to the name of our Facebook page. This was originally made to help clarify the page's affiliation with Wild New Forest Guided Tours. However, following feedback from many of you and after some reflection, we felt it was important to ensure the page name best reflects its wider purpose.

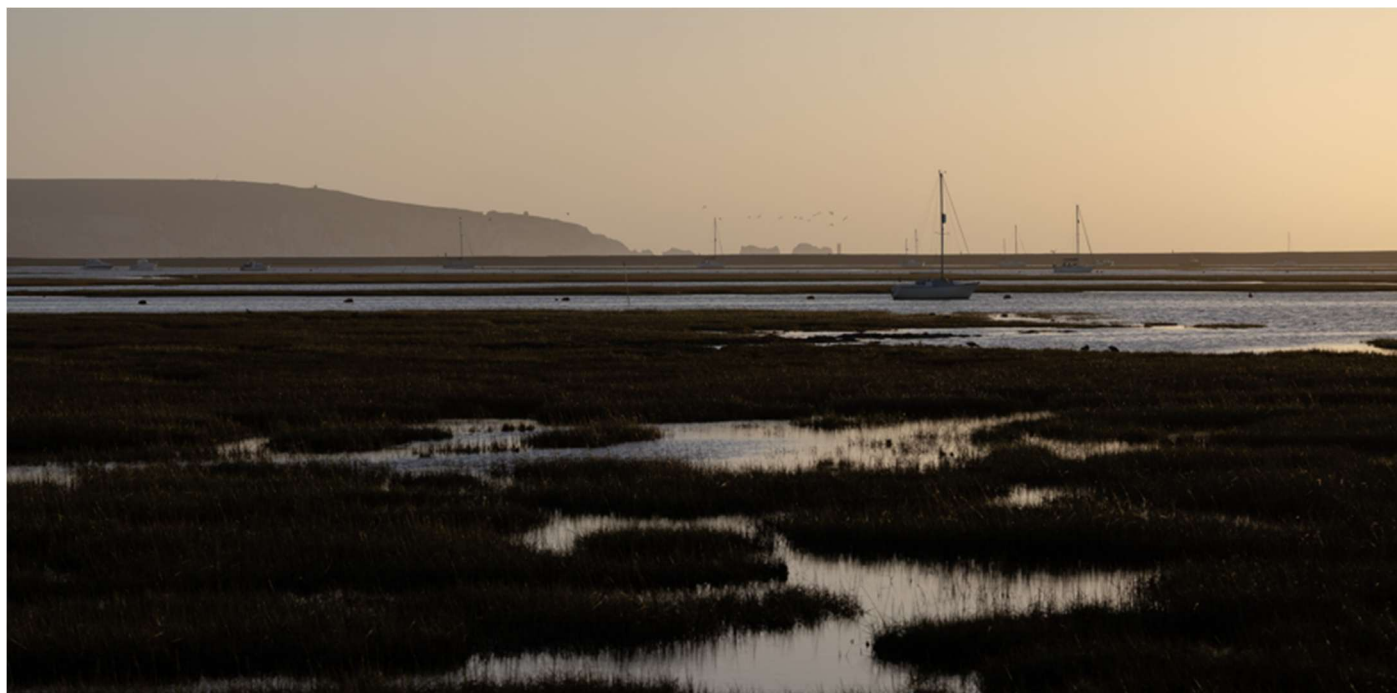
As a result, we've decided that the page will be renamed New Forest Wildlife, reinforcing its role as a shared space for recording, celebrating, and discussing the wildlife of the Forest. Due to Facebook's rules, page name changes are limited to once every 28 days, so the new name will come into effect from 28th January.

We absolutely love seeing your photos, sightings, and stories shared on the page — it has become a vibrant and supportive space for celebrating the Forest and its wildlife. To help keep it that way, we kindly ask that you avoid sharing precise locations for sensitive species and please refrain from posting images of Red Deer



or rutting activity. These simple steps make a real difference in helping protect the wildlife we all care so deeply about.

Thank you, as always, for your thoughtful feedback and continued support. It is genuinely appreciated and plays a vital role in shaping the positive community that surrounds New Forest Wildlife. 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.



Sunset over Keyhaven Marsh, Dec 2025 © Wild New Forest Guided Tours CIC

## 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

Drive with care – animals on the road!

No fires or barbecues\*

No wild camping

Help wildlife by keeping to the main tracks

**Be Forest Friendly!**

Park only in car parks

\*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](http://newforestnpa.gov.uk)

[thenewforest.co.uk](http://thenewforest.co.uk)

# Upcoming Tours

Beaulieu River Boat Trip			Twelve Wild Walks			From Forest to Sea: Lymington Wildlife Walk		
Feb	Sun 8th	0800-1030	Feb	Sun 1st	1100-1300	Mar	Thur 5th	1000-1200
April	Sun 15th	0700-0930	Mar	Sun 1st	1100-1300	Apr	Wed 8th	1000-1200
May	Thur 14th	0830-1100	Apr	Sun 5th	1200-1400	May	Thur 21st	1000-1200
			May	Mon 3rd	1100-1300	June	Wed 3rd	1000-1200
Beaulieu River Extended Cruise			Jun	Sun 28th	1100-1300			
Jan	Sun 25th	0830-1130				Heart of the Forest Wildlife Walk: Lyndhurst		
Feb	Sun 28th	1300-1600	Three-Hour Birding			Feb	Thur 26th	1000-1200
Mar	Sat 28th	1300-1600	Jan	Sat 17th	0900-1200	Mar	Wed 11th	1000-1200
April	Sat 11th	1200-1500	Feb	Sat 14th	0900-1200	Apr	Wed 1st	1000-1200
May	Mon 25th	1230-1530	Mar	Sun 22nd	0700-1000	May	Thur 28th	1000-1200
June	Tue 30th	1500-1800	Apr	Sat 4th	0800-1100	June	Tue 23rd	1000-1200
			May	Wed 27th	0700-1000			
			June	Sun 21st	1400-1700	Photographic Workshop (Terns)		
Sunset Cruise						May	Sat 2nd	1000-1400
May	Sun 3rd	1800-2000	Discover Nature: Family Adventure					
June	Sun 21st	1800-2000	Feb	Tue 17th	1100-1300	Spring Migration Explorer Walk		
June	Mon 29th	1830-2030	Apr	Mon 6th	1200-1400	Apr	Fri 10th	0900-1100
			May	Mon 4th	1200-1400	May	Fri 1st	0900-1100
Newtown Harbour & Beaulieu River Tour			June	Sat 6th	0900-1100			
May	Mon 29th	1100-1500						
			Wild Beginnings: Discover the New Forest			Keyhaven Dusk Walks		
Wild Wilverley Walk			Mar	Sat 7th	1000-1200	Mar	Fri 6th	1630-1830
Mar	Tue 24th	1000-1200	Apr	Tue 14th	1300-1500	Apr	Mon 6th	1800-2000
Apr	Tue 7th	1000-1200	June	Sat 27th	1200-1400			
May	Wed 20th	1000-1200				Birdwatching for beginners		
June	Tue 2nd	1000-1200	Bird Song Workshop – Spring Birdsng			May	Mon 4th	0800-1000
			Mar	Sun 29th	0730-1030	June	Mon 22nd	0900-1100
Wildlife of the Open Forest: Hampton Ridge			Apr	Sat 11th	0730-1030			
Mar	Fri 6th	1000-1200				Butterfly Explorer Walk		
Apr	Fri 10th	1300-1500	Nightjar dusk walks			May	Thur 14th	1200-1400
May	Tue 26th	1000-1200	May	Thurs 21st	1930-2130	June	Thu 4th	0900-1100
June	Thu 25th	1000-1200	June	Sat 19th	1930-2130			
						Woodland Bird Walk		
New Forest Wildlife wander			Hawfinch Roost Walk			May	Wed 27th	1100-1400
Jan	Sun 25th	1300-1500	Jan	Sun 18th	0700-0900	June	Mon 22nd	1200-1400
Feb	Sun 22nd	1300-1500	Jan	Wed 28th	0700-0900			
Mar	Sun 8th	1300-1500	Jan	Fri 30th	0700-0900	Flora Explorer Walk		
Apr	Fri 3rd	1200-1400	Feb	Sat 21st	0630-0830	May	Sat 16th	1000-1200
May	Sat 30th	1200-1400				June	Fri 19th	1000-1200
June	Sat 6th	1300-1500	Hatchet Pond Wild Walk & Picnic					
			June	Sat 20th	1100-1400			

Day Tours			
New Forest & Coast Wildlife safari		Portland & Weymouth	
Feb	Mon 23rd	Feb	Mon 16th
Mar	Mon 30th	Mar	Fri 27th
Apr	Thur 9th		
Somerset Levels		Martin Down	
Feb	Wed 18th	May	Fri 15th
Feb	Wed 25th	June	Fri 26th
Mar	Mon 23rd		
June	Fri 5th		

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