

Chris Packham's Wildlife Guide



Wildlife expert and TV presenter, Chris Packham, gives Camping in the Forest the lowdown on his top species of wildlife to find in the New Forest and how to spot them...

"The New Forest is a haven for wildlife. A unique ecosystem in an increasingly urbanised South East England, The New Forest covers everything from heathlands, marshes and ancient woodlands, allowing a plethora of habitats which are elsewhere scarce in the UK, to flourish. Here's a few of my favourite species to look out for and enjoy."

The Dung Beetle

The dung beetle is a fascinating creature. Despite its somewhat unwholesome lifestyle, feeding almost exclusively on dung, they are an important part of the New Forest ecosystem. Mostly found during summer months amongst grassy woodland areas, you can spot them by their large, dark brown, shiny armoured bodies, dwelling near animal droppings. Incredibly strong for their form, some exotic dung beetles can roll up to 10 times their weight, with some males pushing the equivalent of a human pulling six, full double-decker buses. By burying and consuming dung in this way, they drastically improve nutrient recycling and soil structure around them. Remarkable!



The Buzzard

Unlike much of the rest of the UK, the New Forest remains relatively untouched by modern agricultural methods or urbanisation, and as such, is a fantastic place to see birds. One of my personal favourites and a real wildlife success story is the buzzard. Here throughout the year, buzzards are plentiful, so are



easy to spot – and hear – and can be seen soaring on the mild currents of air produced in the New Forest. The rare Honey buzzard even makes an appearance during late-spring and summer, their unmistakeable, loud, repeated 'mews' heard regularly throughout the forest. Look out for large, birds of prey with mixed browns and cream plumage, hooked bills, broad wings, short necks and short tails.

Deer

One of the creatures which the New Forest is best known for is its deer. Fallow deer, roe deer, red deer and sika deer are all present in good numbers, and despite popular belief, are often conspicuous creatures. With little experience, telling the species apart is fairly straight forward – most obvious by their different tails or markings. Deer are most likely to be seen early or late in the day when disturbance is at a minimum. If you're lucky, you will even glimpse them lying or feeding in secluded clearings. Flourishing here since the 11th century, the deer gorge on the abundance of plants and grasses available to them, helping keep the forest ecosystem in check.



The Dragonfly

The New Forest is one of the best places in the UK to spot dragonflies. Of the 36 species which exist in this county, a whopping 75% of them can be found in the New Forest. With their beautiful colours ranging from very pale blue, through shades of red to black, and all with very varied behaviour, they are fascinating to watch. As fairly large and robust insects, dragonflies have large compound eyes in the centre of their heads. Easy to spot from April until October or November, they are cold blooded creatures that rely on warm air to help raise their body temperatures. Despite this,



they are highly-skilled and ferocious hunters and predators that chase their insects-food down in flight.

Butterflies

Throughout the year, the New Forest becomes awash with vibrant colour as the seasons change and with them, the species of butterfly which flourish there. From April, bright yellow brimstones and lurid peacocks (pictured) fly amongst the bluebells, and in July, the flashing orange of fritillaries can be seen along woodlands, feasting on bramble blossom nectar. Following sympathetic forestry activities in recent years to keep their numbers up, today 40 of the 60 species of butterfly in the UK can be found in the New Forest. Absolutely remarkable creatures in their own right, some of these fragile insects, such as the painted lady, complete epic annual journeys from mainland Europe every year on their migration paths, to dwell in the New Forest. Some favour the heathlands, others the thick forestry areas and some the mires and woodlands, but all are a sight to behold in their own colourful glory, so take time to observe their incredible lives.

