

Birds on Ashdown Forest

March / April

March is a time when the weather can do just about anything from 6 inches of snow to 18 degrees Celsius. Early spring is the beginning of the most arduous time for birds – the breeding season.

The first birds to get underway are Crossbills and Woodlark. Both do nest on the Forest; Crossbills prefer big thick pine trees and Woodlarks prefer open bare ground, so both are well suited to the habitats available on the Forest!

Crossbills are very hard to find, which is amazing considering that the males are a beautiful parrot-like red all over and are about the size of a Blackbird. They spend most of their time in small flocks feeding in pine or larch.

Woodlark can be quite easy to see at this time of the year because the males will be performing their song-flight. The Woodlark's song is probably one of the most distinctive and pleasing to listen to. Once they get on the ground, however, you only find them by literally flushing them from under your feet!

As March moves on all "resident" species will be getting ready for the new season ahead. From early March Song Thrush, Mistle Thrush, Blackbird, Great Tit, Coal Tit, Marsh Tit and Wren all tune up and start singing in earnest.

In the deciduous woodland around the Forest Great Spotted Woodpeckers will be drumming to sound their territory. Treecreeper and Nuthatch will be very busy and more visible than normal. And before the leaves get on the trees look out for the ever elusive Lesser Spotted Woodpecker at the tops of trees.

By the end of March the first odd migrant birds may turn up, including Yellow Wagtail and Wheatear. The best spot to keep an eye out is between Box and Friends car parks on any open grassland. Also Firecrest begin to pass through so look around holly trees.

As we go through April hopefully more migrants will begin arriving and making themselves heard. Redstart come back in mid-to-end April and should be singing shortly after. The first warblers to start singing are Chiffchaffs but by the end of the month the first Willow Warbler should be heard.

During April always check through any flocks of birds you see because so much could be on the move and anything could get mixed in. Especially watch tit-flocks - many warblers often choose to move through with tits, e.g., Firecrest, Yellow-Browed Warbler, Blackcap, Whitethroat, Chiffchaff, Willow Warbler, Redstart, and many others.

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