

# Birds on Ashdown Forest

May / June

May and June are one of the busiest times for birds. By the beginning of May nearly all the migrant species are present, with many more passing through. Redstart, Willow Warbler, Cuckoo, Hobby, Tree Pipit, Turtle Dove and Whitethroat are the key birds coming in at this time and can be found on the forest if you know where to look! Some good areas are Spring Garden and Garden of Eden. In the evenings displaying Woodcock can be heard and seen roding.

Do watch the Pipits carefully, in the springtime the forest Pipits change! Let me explain: in autumn and winter the forest has a healthy population of migrant Meadow Pipit, however, in the spring and summer time these birds move north to breed and migrant Tree Pipits arrive to replace them. There are a few breeding Meadow Pipits as well, just to confuse matters! By far the best way to tell them apart is by song (which is far too complicated to explain here, sorry!)

Progressing through May other species appear and then disappear including Whinchat, Lesser Whitethroat and Ring Ouzel (the Blackbird's hillbilly cousins). Swallow, House Martin and Swift also pass over the forest, but in low numbers in the springtime.

Some traditionally "winter" species stay to breed on the forest, this includes Redpoll and Mistle Thrush.

Very rarely waders like Curlew and Snipe can be found resting before continuing their migration north. Both Curlew and Snipe used to be breeding species on the forest but sadly this is not the case any more.

As May gives way to June most of the hustle and bustle of finding a mate ebbs and things quieten down. This is a good time to look for Spotted Flycatcher. Woodlark may also be singing again as they have more than one brood in a season.

In early June an evening walk on the forest is always worth while because as the evening fades you could be treated to the wonders of the elusive Nightjar. Nightjars can arrive as early as mid-April but sometimes don't start "singing" until much later. Very little is known about this nocturnal species, their primary "song" is a churring noise which is quite unlike anything else. They also make a "gewick" call and wing-clap. When flying they can look like a bird of prey with long slender wings and tail. A good place to look for Nightjar is Wrens Warren and get there about an hour before dusk. You never know, you might see one!!

Keep an eye on the skies as well because species like Red Kite, Peregrine Falcon, Osprey and Common Buzzard pass by the forest. Aerial displays by "screaming" Hobbies can also be seen as they feed on large insects and dragonflies.

As June comes to an end the forest is a much quieter place as most birds are either nesting or feeding young by now.

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