

BOC Trip to the New Forest, 19th March 2022

On a perfectly cloudless day, with a brisk east wind, nine of us gathered in Acre Down car park in our quest to see Goshawk and whatever else early spring might bring us. First thing, a surprise. In birch scrub just up the hill, following a Treecreeper by the path led to a Firecrest and Marsh Tit – close, brief views not seen by all, but a good start!



Scanning the skies from Acre Down, we soon found our Goshawk. Distant at first, but at times coming much closer – large, long tail, 'flat back' profile – it remained mostly in view for the 20 minutes we were there. A Buzzard was also seen. Other birders were doing the same, one couple settled in with chairs, at this becoming well-known viewpoint for the display flights of this exciting, returned bird to the New Forest.

A second look for the Firecrest didn't reveal it again. We were also on the lookout for a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker reported earlier. We saw a Great Spotted, and early butterflies were out in the sunshine: Red Admiral, Comma and Brimstone. We continued our search for the Lesser Spotted in the broad-leaved woodland along the track below the car park, but couldn't locate it unfortunately.

Then we moved across the A31, picnicked on a great Scots Pine, fresh-fallen in the storms, and walked across Bratley Plain. A probable Dartford Warbler was seen in silhouette on the gorse, Meadow Pipits and Stonechats,



but no Wheatears or Ring Ouzel (it was a Blackbird in the heather). Back under the A31 to Brackley Bottom, a shallow valley where a Great Grey Shrike had been present, and was last seen midweek. Scrutiny from both sides of the valley failed to find it, but there was compensation in plenty more Stonechat(!) and a second Marsh Tit. At the footbridge, the trickle of stream and small pool held a pair of mating toads, mass of newly hatched tadpoles, some tiny fish, and Small-leaved Crowfoot in flower (Three-lobed? New Forest species?). It was a longish walk back to the car park, 10 km in all, but the sun shone all the way. Birds of the day were the Goshawk (a lifer for me!) plus the Firecrest, and all those Stonechats. Species count, never high on heathland, was about 25 in total for the group.

John Froy