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journey into the natural world

Savernake forest SSSI

24th March 2017

We left a cold and overcast Highworth looking forward to a visit to this wonderful forest with its diverse wildlife including the ancient oaks and trees it is famous for.

Bird song welcomed us as we left the vehicle and the walk started with a Robin singing us on our way.

Lesser black backed gull, Rook, Carrion crow and Jackdaw were around at the entrance but more woodland based birds would soon come into view. A fantastic condition Song thrush was singing and the beautiful colours of its plumage could be seen.

A Buzzard flew overhead.



As we walked through the first part of the forest it was clear that spring was on its way as the trees and bushes were breaking bud. Close inspection allowed us to actually really appreciate the beauty of their structure.

There was a male Blackbird singing and a Nuthatch was heard too. Great tit, Blue tit called in the bushes and a Great spotted woodpecker was heard drumming giving a real sense of being in woodland.

Tufted hair grass was sprouting fresh leaves all around and Wood spurge was coming into flower with its beautiful greens and maroon colours.



A loud burst of song was coming from the ever present Wrens and a small group of Goldfinch were high in the trees feeding. A noisy Jay and Pheasant called too from the thick scrub.

A pair of Ravens was flying above and landed in the trees in front of us. Their call is distinctive but actually when they settled in the trees the calls were rather gentle and soft going against their portrayal. It looked as though they were preparing to breed.

Snowdrop (*Galanthus nivalis*) had gone over but their seed capsules were now forming but plants such as Lords and Ladies (*Arum maculatum*) leaves were fresh and bright. There were the plain green leaves as well as the black spotted ones. There were also large patches of Dog's mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*) it was clear that some groups were just males with the anthers clearly showing.



Then we found a large group of Scarlet elf cups in the grass and on the decaying wood. They were some of the largest I have seen and were just beautiful.



As well as these there were also a group of large King Alfred's cakes. These are not unusual but give an indication of the large fungi community in the forest.

Wood pigeon and a Nuthatch were in the surrounding trees. But one of my favourite birds, the Stock dove was seen with its mate inspecting a nest hole in a large tree. The plumage was fantastic with the steel blue grey of its feathers and the violet and green sheen and crisp black marks. The call is also one of my favourites. I think this bird is so underrated.

A Chiffchaff was loudly calling along with Chaffinch, Stock dove and Long tailed tits, Great spotted woodpecker, Magpie and Green woodpecker.

The Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) bushes were in flower providing flowers for the early Bumblebees that were seen flying around. There was also shooting Wild raspberry (*Rubus idaeus*) and Hedge garlic or Jack-by-the-hedge (*Alliaria petiolata*) along the rides.

Coal tits were calling as they fed in the branches.

The first named ancient oak was seen along the ride. This was the "White road oak". A Grey squirrel bounded about in the large boughs.



Further fungi species were seen on the dead wood. They were so bright and attractive. This is most probably *Stereum hirsutum*.



Whilst walking along one of the rides a fantastic Sparrowhawk was seen flying above us. This bird is always a treat to see.

A Mistle thrush was singing and then gave good views as it sat in a low branch. Another Buzzard soared over us and then a Red kite glided low over us giving good views of its upper and lower plumage. Great spotted woodpecker was again drumming and a Marsh tit was calling as it foraged among the low scrub.

Then a pair of Marsh tits gave a good long view only a couple of meters away allowing us to see all the features of the bird clearly.



It was really nice to see large parkland oaks. These are really useful for invertebrates as well as other species.

A Muntjac deer saw us as we saw it and it attempted to hide in the scrub but we could still see it well.

The “Surveyed oak” .



It was now warming up and the sun was coming through making the whole forest feel spring like.



The “Spider oak”



A lovely male Great spotted woodpecker was seen on one of the large oaks and we had clear views of its plumage. A couple of Goldcrest moved about in the branches calling as they went. A Chiffchaff called loudly from the next tree. A large Bumblebee flew along the forest floor and a couple of Bullfinches also joined us as we sat and listened to the sounds of the forest.

The richness of the fauna and flora can be shown by the number of species seen on a small piece of decaying log. There are ferns, bryophytes and lichens not to mention all the other species that will be around.



A couple of Roe deer ran as they spotted us but then settled to feed not too far away when we stopped still to watch.



A male Tawny owl called as we walked back along the ride in the late afternoon.

Another good show from a male Great spotted woodpecker in a large oak was joined by a Treecreeper with nest material in its beak. And then another Treecreeper flew across the ride in front of us.

The glowing yellow flowers of Lesser celandine (*Ranunculus ficaria*) was seen along the woodland edges as we made our way back after a really enjoyable walk at this great site.

Michael

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