

## Chiddingfold Nightingale and butterfly special Highstreet Green nr. Dunsfold

Nightingales generally arrive in the second week of April and sing in the daytime but the song becomes less frequent so that by the end of May you may get little chance to hear it. You need to be extremely lucky to see a nightingale, I have often stood within feet of them while they're singing loudly and still not been able to see them! They are becoming so rare here that disturbing them is definitely not recommended, just enjoy the amazing song, definitely their greatest feature! I have not specified where to find the nightingales because they move around. The forestry operations continuously harvest the hazel to keep a mixed age structure so you will see some cleared areas usually with the cuttings pushed into edges making the dense habitat the birds love. Our walk should cross enough suitable territory to hear them. Listen to the song on my website a few times so you recognise it, nothing other than unmistakable but you might confuse them at first with thrushes.

Other birds may be numerous: sparrowhawks may be seen, maybe even a goshawk if you're lucky and good at identification! Garden warblers and whitethroats should be present and grey wagtails near the many streams. Jays, nuthatches, treecreepers and all the tit family of course. Thrushes, dunnocks, wrens and blackbirds will all be there.

Butterflies will be present all summer of course. Different species fly at different times so a second summer visit is worthwhile.

**These instructions start at Botany Bay. See the separate parking guidance info for alternative options.**

**Walk east (turn right facing the road with your back to the gate) along the road for about 300 yards** and you will see a sign for Dunsfold Ryse on the right and three large black unwelcoming gates. **Go through the centre gate**, it is a public bridleway, and very quickly you go through another farm style gate. (Turn around and look for a post with a button on it to release the gate.)

**Continue down the lovely bridleway** past the pond and house etc and enjoy the parkland and avenue of oaks as you drop downhill. There's a good chance of seeing or at least hearing buzzards here and seeing wildflowers. At the bottom join the track and there is a pretty stream. Continue straight on uphill with fields to left and right. **You now enter Lagfold Copse** and continue in the same direction through mixed woodland with old coppiced hazel on your right and more mature woodland on your left. The land opens out on the left and gorse and pendulous sedge appear, worth looking for birds and butterflies here.

**At the crossroads turn right** along a strong wide forest track (prohibiting most horseriding) lined with many primroses in early spring. **After about half a mile look on your left for a small sign to tell you that you have reached a Butterfly Conservation Reserve called Oaken Wood.** (If you see a major track coming from your left you have gone too far). Enter the reserve here on the small path and follow it carefully to the right through and under the

trees and into a more open area and you'll soon be surrounded by Broom! In the summer, all along this area, butterflies should be seen and just enjoy the path, flowers and birds that should be singing and enjoying the habitat. Expect chiffchaffs, blackcaps and resident wrens, dunnocks and robins, thrushes (mistle thrush are present) and others. The path seems to come to an end abruptly at a small T junction.

**Turn right and then quickly turn left** at a small path through some young trees with a good landmark being a white poplar with its distinctive bark marked with lines of diamond shaped pores (called lenticels). This path then continues across the reserve through a damper section passing some scrub woodland on both sides and ends up at another T junction. You could investigate further here by turning left and the open areas could be productive for butterflies, insects and some bird species. If you don't investigate there **our route turns right at the T junction** heading to the main incoming track and passes some signs about the reserve.

**Turn right at the track** and head back towards the centre of the forest. **At the T junction turn left.** This next stretch I really enjoy as it passes through the forest and bends right gently downhill with a valley on the left with a thin covering of large trees but a rich understory. Then the track turns uphill again and curves around until it reaches another T junction.

**Turn right here** and follow the route up and over the small hill with a bit of a clearing on top, soon after you will see a footpath sign to your left. **Leave the track here and follow the footpath** through the mixed woodland.

**The footpath will soon meet another track where you need to turn right.** (IF YOU PARKED AT FISHER LANE THIS IS WHERE YOU WILL JOIN OUR WALK) It's then a short walk to the **next T junction where you turn left.** You will soon see a cleared patch on the right where the hazel has been harvested and some dense areas created at the back. Keep on the path down the hill to the bridge across the stream and up the other side listening all the time. It might be worth checking the stream for a grey wagtail, they often nest and feed under bridges.

**Follow the track up the hill and around the bends** and this will take you back to Botany Bay.

If you have failed to find a nightingale, for a last chance there is a fairly obvious path on the left after the bends you could take. It has a fence on the right covered in honeysuckle in places but with dense hazel nearby. If you follow this it eventually meets a footpath going the same way and reaches a rather tatty farm sort of place and leads you out to the road. It's then a short walk to the right to get back to Botany Bay where your car should be parked. If not continue along Highstreet Green until you find your car. IF YOU PARKED AT FISHER LANE START THE INSTRUCTIONS FROM BOTANY BAY FROM HERE.

**Parking guidance.**

There is very little parking to visit the forest. Botany Bay is the only forest entrance without 'No parking' signs. It is popular and many people seem to meet there at say, 10.00 am, a popular time for walkers! There is parking either side of the entrance way, possibly for 6 cars. My advice is to get there earlier, it's better for birdsong anyway.

While there are signs at other possible places they are not threatening fines, they are there to stop people blocking entrances that may be needed for forest operations. I have used them and left plenty of room for lorries to pass. Nothing has happened.

There are also places you can park (sensibly) where there are no signs but you will need to walk a bit extra. They are all shown on an extra downloadable page. I have not tested all these but there is evidence of usage for parking.