

Wildlife of the Hampshire Downs

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

- Day 1** Meet in Alton, evening meal. Excursion after dinner.
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- Day 2** Noar Hill, Old Winchester Hill.
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- Day 3** Selborne area. Depart for home mid-afternoon.
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Departs

June

Focus

Flowers and general natural history.

Grading

Grade A –easy day walks.

Dates and Prices

Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code GBR01)

Highlights:

- Musk, Fly, Pyramidal and Frog Orchids at Noar Hill
- Lesser Whitethroat, Yellowhammer & Turtle Dove
- Various species of Butterfly
- Round-headed Rampion, Yellow-wort, Kidney & Horseshoe Vetches
- Led by a naturalist expert



From top to bottom: Fly Orchid, Yellowhammer and Pyramidal orchid



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Introduction

Hampshire once had vast chalk downland areas which are unfortunately now very much reduced. However some rich fragments still remain, and this habitat is particularly special for its abundance of plant species. Chalk downland is a habitat of poor soil, and it is this characteristic that ensures a large variety of plant species occur, because no single species can become dominant. Indeed chalk downland, because of its poor soil, is one of the richest plant habitats in the country. This tour will visit many of the finest examples of the remaining Hampshire chalk downlands, along with the other special habitat of these areas, beech and yew woodland. This combination will allow the visiting naturalist to see the formation of plant habitats on the chalk, to observe a wide variety of plant species (many nationally uncommon and rare), plus the opportunity to see the species of butterfly and bird which frequent these plant rich areas. The aim of this tour is not to list as many plant species as we can during the weekend, but to get an understanding of the ecology of the chalk. We will, of course, also see many interesting species of wildlife and hopefully you will leave with a desire to return to this superb habitat.

Itinerary

Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Meet at the Hotel

We will meet at our hotel base, in the market town of Alton, for an evening meal and subsequent drinks in the bar, providing the chance to get to know everyone. For those who wish to venture out, we will take a trip into the surrounding countryside in search of flowers and wildlife after dinner.

Day 2

We will make a start after breakfast and travel from our hotel to Noar Hill. This superb area of chalk downland contains many orchid species that should be flowering including Musk, Fly, Pyramidal, Frog and Twayblade. The site also contains the typical plants of any south coast downland, and at this time of year the scents from the herbaceous plants, including Thyme and Marjoram, are intoxicating. Noar Hill is also good for butterflies and we will keep our eyes open for the many blues found upon the Hill. Birds such as Lesser and Common Whitethroat and Yellowhammer are likely to be found and it is not unusual to see Buzzard, Red Kite or Hobby drift overhead.

In the afternoon we will travel south towards Portsdown Hill. We will pass Old Winchester Hill, where from the Iron Age hillfort on the highest point of this National Nature Reserve, the view extends south across the clean waters of the River Meon to the coast of the Isle of Wight and the New Forest. The woodlands of this reserve are composed of the "Hampshire Weed" - the Yew tree - and left to its own devices the whole reserve would become a Yew wood. However, through management the reserve is a mixture of habitats ranging from Juniper scrub (curiously found on the chalk in the south and on the mountains of the north) to open, short cropped sward. The mixture

of habitats leads to the development of a wide range of chalk flowers including large patches of Yellow-wort, Horseshoe Vetch, Kidney Vetch and a large population of the uncommon Round-headed Rampion. The reserve also has populations of Fragrant Orchid.

Arriving at Portsdown Hill, the most southerly chalk ridge in Hampshire, we shall look for Bee Orchids, Pyramid Orchids, unusual yellow forms of Ivy Broomrape and the extremely rare Field Cow-wheat.

Day 3

This morning we will explore the area south of Selborne. This area is part of the north face of the Hampshire chalk downs, known collectively as the Hampshire Hangers. This north face is dominated by Beech and Yew woodland which contains unusual plants such as the saprophytic Bird's Nest Orchid but also contains large Hazel coppice stumps amongst the Beech and Yew. In the woods both Redstart and Wood Warbler can be found, alongside Great Spotted and Green Woodpeckers, Cuckoo, Red-legged and Grey Partridges and Hobby. Dormice also occur in the area (although we would have to be very lucky to see one) and White and Green Flowered Helleborine occur amongst the ancient Beech pollards. To add to the natural delights of the area, we also have the historical importance of this region to natural history with Selborne being the home of the famous 18th century naturalist and clergyman Gilbert White. We will probably have a quick lunch locally before deciding how to spend our remaining few hours, however the exact itinerary will be fairly flexible and dependent on what species we have seen and those we have missed. Around mid to late-afternoon we will depart for home.

Tour grading

There will be no serious or strenuous walking, with easy walks on gentle terrain.

Focus

The general natural history of the Hampshire Downs, birds, butterflies, plants and fungi.

Food & accommodation included in the price

Accommodation, breakfasts and three-course dinners are included in the cost. Pub lunches and drinks are not included.

Clothing and Equipment

Binoculars are useful. Stout shoes or trainers will be adequate footwear, although it may be worth bringing walking boots and waterproof jackets if the weather looks like being wet.

Transport

For this tour, we hire a nine-seat minibus. Please assist our tour leader in ensuring that there is a rotation of seats around the tour vehicle to allow each tour member to enjoy approximately equal time in the front. In order to be fair to all participants, we regret that we are unable to guarantee a perpetual front seat to those who might suffer from motion sickness or other concerns.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website.

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