

The Best of North Wales – A Birdwatching Tour

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Itinerary

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| Day 1 | Arrive Betws-y-Coed |
| Day 2 | Dee Estuary; Kinmel Bay |
| Day 3 | Ynys-hir RSPB Nature Reserve; Dyfi Osprey Project |
| Day 4 | Great Orme Head; RSPB Conwy Nature Reserve |
| Day 5 | Cemlyn Bay; South Stack Cliffs RSPB Nature Reserve |
| Day 6 | Nearby uplands; depart early afternoon |

Departs

June

Focus

Birds & other wildlife

Grading

Grade A. Easy to moderate walks.

Dates and Prices

See www.naturetrek.co.uk (tour code GBR260)

Highlights

- Wood Warbler, Pied Flycatcher & Whinchat
- Thousands of seabirds: Puffin & terns
- Ospreys at Dyfi's Osprey Project
- Choughs at South Stack RSPB
- Upland species may include Ring Ouzel



Top to bottom: Choughs, Pied Flycatcher, Puffins



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Introduction

Birding in North Wales between late spring and early summer is widely regarded as one of the ornithological highlights of the British wildlife calendar, and for good reason! The diverse range of habitats to be found in North Wales include high moorlands, estuarine marshes, dense Sessile Oak woodlands and vast river valleys, which all deliver their own set of desirable species. During this 6-day holiday we will explore them all and hope to enjoy the many avian highlights.

Our first destination will be the Dee Estuary, which straddles the Welsh and English border. It is one of the UK's premier birdwatching locations, especially for shorebirds and wetland species. In May, passage waders such as Bar-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel and Redshank are numerous, while inland summer visitors will announce themselves with delightful song. Reed Warblers, Sedge Warblers and Lesser Whitethroats can be found in adjacent scrub here.

We will then travel inland to explore the scenic valleys that Wales is so famous for. Here, dense Sessile Oak woodlands are the key summering grounds for a whole host of exciting species. The trilling of Wood Warblers is a memorable sound, and we hope to encounter several of these striking birds as well as Pied Flycatchers at their nest boxes, another typically Welsh sighting. The woodlands here also support good numbers of Spotted Flycatchers, Redstarts, Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers and Willow Warblers.

The North-west coastline is dominated by cliffs which form the perfect nesting areas for a wonderful array of seabirds. Puffins and Guillemots can be found in great numbers, whilst Choughs are often seen in small groups, either flying over-head or feeding on the short grasses along the cliff tops. Terns are heavily abundant here too and can comprise upwards of five species (if we are lucky!), including vast numbers of Sandwich Terns. Watching an active tern colony can be a thrilling experience, and the nearby birds-of-prey will ensure there is always plenty of activity. Lastly, we will spend a brief amount of time in the uplands where we will try to find any species which we have missed previously. Whinchat, Ring Ouzel, and potentially Red Grouse, are all possible here and will round off a successful holiday to the very best birdwatching locations in North and West Wales!



Great Orme Head

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

Arrive Betws-y-Coed; afternoon walk

We plan to meet today at around 5pm, at our lovely hotel located in the picturesque village of Betws-y-Coed. We will then take a short afternoon walk in the surrounding areas of the hotel, in search of Dippers, Grey Wagtails and other birds, before settling down for our first meal together where our tour leader will discuss our programme for the next few days.



The Royal Oak Hotel

Day 2

Dee Estuary

Our first full day will be spent exploring one of the UK's premier birdwatching locations – the Dee Estuary. Made up of tidal mudflats and estuarine marshes, this is an excellent location to find a whole host of species in a short space of time. Here, we will be aiming to find many wetland and shorebird species. Sandwich Terns are particularly abundant, often seen flying along the shoreline carrying their recent catch of Sand Eels. The mudflats are also an important site for migrating



Sedge Warbler

waders, including both Whimbrel and Bar-tailed Godwit, and the area is particularly good for Redshank. Occasionally a Spotted Redshank may also be mixed in to test our identification skills! A short lunch break will be taken near to our next stop of Rhyl's Brickfield Ponds, where we could find Sedge and Reed Warblers as well as Lesser Whitethroats. Lastly, we will visit Kimnel Bay to enjoy a spot of sea-watching which may produce an Arctic Skua, or perhaps, some cetacean activity!

Day 3

Ynys-hir RSPB Nature Reserve & Dyfi Ospreys

The Sessile Oak woodlands of the Ynys-hir RSPB Reserve are the perfect breeding grounds for several summer migrants, as well as scarce resident species. We should expect vibrant birdsong at this time of year which will aid our efforts to uncover the avian highlights that reside here. Wood Warblers and Pied Flycatchers thrive, as do Spotted Flycatchers, and we may get lucky and chance

upon a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker too. The superb woodlands form only half of the reserve, and as we navigate our way into the open marshes, Sedge and Reed Warblers should be found in abundance and there is a possibility of Grasshopper Warbler too.



Wood Warbler

Waterbirds can also be found along the small pools and tidal estuary, but it is the raptors that will be most notable. The site is a fairly reliable spot for Hen Harriers, as well as the expected Peregrine Falcons, Kestrels and Sparrowhawks. As we near the woodland, Redstarts, Stonechats and other passerines may be found hopping along the fence lines or along sunny glades. This circular walk will allow us to see the best of Wales and the splendid birdlife it is so famous for!

We will spend the day exploring the reserve, before stopping for a packed lunch and then heading to the Dyfi Osprey Project to view the famous pair which return to this site on an annual basis. This is set to be another excellent and varied day!

Day 4

Great Orme Head & RSPB Conwy Nature Reserve

Before visiting the towering Great Orme Head, we will first head for Llandudno, which offers an excellent introduction to seabird identification. Some of the numerous species we will hope to find here include Razorbill, Guillemot and Fulmar, and we will keep our eyes peeled for Black Guillemots and Choughs which can sometimes be seen feeding nearby. Great Orme is a spectacular limestone headland with rocks aging over 339 million years! It is also a tranquil setting where we will take time to enjoy the abundant birdsong and gentle crashing of the waves below.

Our next stop will be the RSPB Conwy Nature Reserve where we will spend the remainder of our afternoon. This is yet another impressive wetland reserve, situated on the east side of the Conwy estuary. Hedgerows here attract Lesser Whitethroat, and the reeds hold Reed and Sedge Warbler and a plethora of other passerines. Nearby, many ducks and waterbirds could be present including a possibility of a Black Tern. Other birds to target include Whinchat, Firecrest and Osprey.



Black Guillemot

Day 5

Cemlyn Bay & South Stack RSPB Nature Reserve

Today will deliver the very best of North Wales. We will begin by visiting Cemlyn Bay. Cemlyn is one of the star reserves managed by the North Wales Wildlife Trust, and is regarded by Anglesey County Council as the "jewel in the crown" of its Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It is valued for both its scenic qualities and its unique range of wildlife. The reserve includes a large lagoon, separated from the sea by a spectacular, naturally created shingle ridge. The bay is famous for its tern colonies, and we will hope to see Sandwich, Common and Arctic Terns breeding. There is also a possibility of Roseate Tern too. Of course, rarities do turn up from time to time, and Cemlyn is frequently cited in history books for its rare terns: both Sooty and Bridled Terns have been seen in recent years, but we would have to be very lucky indeed to see either of these rarely sighted specialities.

Next we will head to the South Stack RSPB Nature Reserve on Anglesey, crossing the Menai Straights as we do so. This reserve comprises heathland, farmland and steep-sided cliffs, the latter the perfect breeding grounds for Razorbills, Guillemots and Puffins. We can also expect to see small groups of Choughs as they navigate themselves around this jagged coastline. Linnets are common in the grasses here, as are Meadow and Rock Pipits. The brave members of our party may choose to walk



Arctic Tern

the 400 steps down and back from the lighthouse. Chough and Guillemot can be enjoyed here and there are viewing points to watch for the wonderful Puffins, all amongst spectacular scenery.

After a bird-filled day, we will try our luck to locate a thriving population of Red Squirrels on Anglesey, before making our way back to the hotel for our final dinner as a group.

Day 6

Nearby uplands; depart

After breakfast, we will have time to head into the uplands nearby in search of some species we may have missed during this holiday. Ring Ouzels, Whinchats and Meadow Pipits are species we may hope to encounter, as well as Common Buzzards and Ravens. We will aim to return to the hotel in the early afternoon where we will say our farewells as our wonderful Welsh holiday comes to an end.

Tour Grading & focus

Grade A: Walking will be mostly on well-trodden paths, but many are undulating, and a reasonable level of fitness will be required for this holiday. There will be days with little walking too.

This is primarily a birdwatching holiday, though every opportunity will be given to sample other wildlife that North Wales has to offer.

Weather, clothing & equipment

We will hope for warm, sunny days, but who knows what the fickle Welsh weather may throw at us, so guests should come prepared for all eventualities! It's best to bring a variety of layers, including waterproofs and sun cream, and to check the forecast in the run up to the tour.

Binoculars are essential to get the most from this tour, and cameras are optional for those that wish. Telescopes will be helpful for sea-watching or watching the Puffins. However, your leader will also have a scope to share if circumstances allow.

Food and accommodation included in the price

Breakfast and evening meals are included in the cost of this holiday, beginning with dinner on Day 1 and finishing with breakfast on Day 6. Lunches, daytime snacks and drinks are not included in the cost of this tour, and we will stop at local pubs or cafes for lunch and comfort breaks each day. Accommodation will be provided in twin or double bedded rooms at the very comfortable Royal Oak Hotel in the beautiful village of Betws-y-Coed. All rooms include en-suite facilities. The hotel is centrally-based to allow us to target the very best wildlife of the region.

Extending your holiday

We would be more than happy to book additional nights at the hotel for you for an additional cost. This can either be based on a dinner, bed and breakfast; or bed and breakfast basis. Please request this at the time of booking.

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. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests, at the time of booking.

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