

The Great British Bird Race – Kent

Naturetrek Wildlife Tour

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Travel to Kent
Day 1-3	Bird Race around Kent
Day 3	Depart

Departs

January

Focus

See as many bird species as possible in a 48-hour bird race

Grading

B. No long walks but many sites in quick succession. Birding at pace

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code GBR347)

Highlights:

- The thrill of the bird race
- Marsh & Hen Harriers on the North Kent Marshes
- Bewick's Swans and geese flocks
- Wintering waders at Oare Marshes
- Grebes and divers offshore
- Wintering finches with Brambling under the beeches
- Short-eared and Barn Owls likely
- Potentially a big total in a rich and diverse county



From top: Hen Harrier, Greater White-fronted Geese & Black-tailed Godwits (images courtesy of Shutterstock images)



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Introduction

Welcome to Naturetrek's Winter Bird Race – a fun, friendly and fast-paced event designed to celebrate the incredible birdlife of the UK during the colder months. Over 48 hours, in late January, you'll be part of a team aiming to see or hear as many bird species as possible across your chosen region.

This is not a competition in the traditional sense, but a shared challenge that combines camaraderie, exploration and a touch of strategy. You'll be guided by experienced tour leaders, who will plan efficient routes, navigate key habitats, and ensure everyone stays safe, warm, and energised throughout.

While the pace will be brisk to cover a wide range of habitats—from coastal marshes and ancient woodlands to reservoirs, farmland, mountains and heath—it's equally important that we all enjoy the experience. Birding should be inclusive and accessible, and leaders will always be mindful of the group's needs, offering rest breaks and adapting where necessary.

We encourage you to take in the beautiful landscapes as we go, be respectful of nature and one another and, above all, have fun. Whether your team records 90 species or 130, we hope you come away with memorable encounters, new birding friends, and a reinvigorated love for Britain's winter birds.

Good luck, happy birding – and let the race begin!



Itinerary

Please note that the itinerary below offers an outline of likely sites visited over the bird race. However, your leader will be reactive and will make judgements with the aim of seeing as many species as possible. This will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Arrive Faversham

The bird race commences at 2pm and to facilitate this, we have organised a 12:00 check-in with your hotel. Please arrive in plenty of time to check in, have some lunch and be ready for the start of the Great British Bird Race

Days 1-3

Bird Race Across Kent

Your leader will devise a route visiting a variety of habitats in order to achieve the maximum number of species in the 48 available hours. This will be flexible during the race depending upon many factors. These could be due to rarities being sighted locally or failure to see a target species at a specific site.

Likely sites/habitats to be visited will include:

The North Kent Marshes:

The North Kent Marshes are a vast area of intertidal mudflats, saltmarsh, fresh marsh and reedbeds around the Thames estuary. Sites such as Oare Marshes and the Isle of Sheppey provide a winter haven for thousands of wildfowl and waders. Species that may be found include White-fronted Geese, Brent Geese, Bewick's Swans, Black-tailed Godwits, Bar-tailed Godwits, Knot & Avocets. The Isle of Sheppey is renowned for its raptors and time here could yield Hen Harrier, Marsh Harrier, Merlin, Short-eared Owl and Barn Owl. Sheppey is also one of the most reliable sites in the UK for Rough-legged Buzzard, although sightings are much rarer than they used to be.

Dungeness:

The wide open shingle headland of Dungeness is an atmospheric place and a renowned British birding site. Gravel extraction has left a series of large deep pits that attract wintering birds in great number. Great White Egrets join Little Egrets and Grey Herons in good numbers and they share the water with a great number of wildfowl. Smew used to be regular here but are now scarce and might only be expected in the coldest of weather. Gulls roost in good numbers and time should be spent checking them for Caspian Gull, which will be amongst them. The power station compound is a good place to look for a wintering Black Redstart, while nearby Walland Marsh still hosts a healthy wintering flock of Bewick's Swans and Tree Sparrows still cling on.

The Stour Valley:

The fen and reedbed habitat of the lower Stour Valley will be on the itinerary. Stodmarsh and Grove Ferry are great places to look for Water Pipit, Bearded Tit, Water Rail and a host of wildfowl and freshwater waders.

Pegwell Bay & Sandwich:

Tidal mudflats here hold huge numbers of wintering waders while divers and grebes lurk offshore. Nearby Thanet hosts a population of Ring-necked Parakeets that will certainly be looked for to boost the team total.

Other Habitats:

Every species will count, so farmland, scrub and urban areas will all be visited to ensure that no common bird is missed.



Day 3

Bird Race Results & Departure

The bird race will finish at 2pm at which point, the leaders will present their totals to the event recorder. The group will return to the hotel and the results will be announced. Expected departure for home is 4pm.

Drop-offs to stations can be organised.

2026 Bird Race Highlights

Kent had an outstanding 2026 bird race and came second with a huge total of 117 species. The star of the show was the wintering **Red-flanked Bluetail** which graced a west Kent woodland and was much appreciated by the Kent team. A few **Tundra Bean Geese** were noted with the wintering **Bewick's Swan** flock on Walland Marsh while nearby, in the Dungeness area, there were **Cattle**

Egret and Caspian Gull. Purple Sandpipers were along the shoreline of Thanet with **Kittiwake, Gannet and Red-throated Divers** offshore. The North Kent Marshes produced **Bittern, White-fronted Geese** and a lovely **Barn Owl** while the Stour Valley held **Water Pipit**. Large numbers of waders, wildfowl and gulls were observed at coastal sites while inland, hedgerows hosted buntings, finches and winter thrushes.

Grading & Focus

The absolute focus of this tour is to see as many birds as possible. The pace will be brisk and some sightings may only be brief. Time will be of the essence and as soon as target species have been encountered, expect to move on to the next site immediately.

The tour is graded B, due to the higher than normal intensity. However, walking will be kept to a practical minimum and consideration will be given to all participants in terms of pace. The event is designed to be fun and manageable and not to be strenuous. Expect to visit many sites with a lot of getting in and out of the minibus.

Food & Accommodation

Breakfast and dinner are included. Expect a 7am breakfast and an 8pm dinner in order to maximise daylight time in the field. Lunch is not included; expect this to be taken in the field. Your leader will stop at a convenient shop/café en route for you to purchase this.

Rooms are double and twin-bedded, all with private bathroom facilities. A limited number of single-person occupancy rooms are available and may be subject to a supplementary cost.

Clothing

The weather may be cold, wet, windy and even snowy so please be prepared. Bring several layers, including a thermal base layer and waterproof coat and trousers are required. Footwear should be sturdy, waterproof walking boots and a hat and gloves will be essential.

Comfortable, casual clothing and shoes are suggested for the evenings at the hotel.

Equipment

The following is our recommendation of general equipment that you should bring with you.

- Binoculars (essential)
- Telescope (strongly advised but optional)
- Thermos Flask
- Personal first aid kit
- Small waterproof rucksack/day pack
- Wash kit and medication
- Camera and accessories (optional)
- Field guide and reading material

- Refillable water bottle

Meeting Information

By Train

The closest station is Faversham. Transfers to the hotel can be arranged in advance through the Naturetrek Office.

By Car

If you come by car, you may drive directly to the hotel near Faversham. Full address details will be provided in the final joining instructions for the tour. The advised arrival time is 12:00

Tour Transport

For this tour we will be using small 9-seater mini-buses for the day-to-day travel. Please assist our leaders in ensuring that there is a rotation of seats around the vehicle to allow each participant to enjoy approximately equal time in the front. In order to be fair to all, we regret that we are unable to guarantee a perpetual front seat to those who might suffer from motion sickness or other concerns.

Accommodation

If you arrive the night before the trip, or want to stay the night at the end of your trip, then we can arrange this for you at the tour hotel. Please contact the office should you wish to arrange this. Alternatively, there are plenty of accommodation options to be found on Booking.com

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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