

The Best of Dorset's Wildlife

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	RSPB Radipole Lake & RSPB Lodmoor Reserve
Day 2	Durlston & heaths
Day 3	Jurassic Coast
Day 4	Portland & Chesil Beach

Departs

May or June

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code GBR45) or brochure

Grading

A. Easy day walks and optional evening excursions

Focus

Birds, reptiles and other natural history

Highlights

- View nesting seabird colonies at Durlston Cliffs
- Badger-watching
- Look for all 6 of Britain's reptile species on local heathland
- Listen for Nightjars and Noctule Bats at dusk
- See the south-west's largest breeding colony of Common Terns at Lodmoor
- Look for Manx & Balearic Shearwaters at Portland Bill, plus skuas & auks
- Visiting the Jurassic Coast, a World Heritage Site



Images from top: Smooth Snake, Eurasian Badger and the Jurassic Coast



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Introduction

On this short wildlife break we will explore some of Dorset's best nature reserves and enjoy its beautiful rolling countryside from a centrally positioned base, near Dorchester. Dorset's enviable variety of special habitats offers a wealth of natural history, and there's no better time to enjoy this than in the early summer.



Adder

On our first afternoon we will visit Radipole Lake and look for the Marsh Harriers and numerous warblers that breed in its reed beds, including the Cetti's Warbler with its loud, explosive song. Around the corner at Lodmoor we'll find the south-west's largest breeding colony of Common Terns.

On our second day we will visit Durlston Cliffs to view one of England's most southerly seabird colonies, and look for breeding Peregrines and Ravens. We will

then move on to some of the local heaths, which are home to all six of Britain's reptile species, including the stunning, jewel-green Sand Lizard and the very rare Smooth Snake. We'll also look for Dartford Warblers amongst the gorse and Hobbies as they hawk for dragonflies overhead; then, as dusk approaches, the sound of 'churring' Nightjars will permeate the evening air as Noctule Bats take to the wing.

The next day we will head for the Jurassic Coast, a World Heritage Site that stretches from Orcombe Point in Devon to Old Harry Rocks in Dorset and tells the story of the region's past 185 million years. Here, beneath our feet, lie the clues to a natural history of a past world, from ammonites to belemnites, sea dragons to dinosaurs, and we will take great delight in exploring a coast line that offers a window into the wonders of the past.

One evening we will go in search of badgers, perhaps utilising one of the nearby hides.

Finally we will visit Portland Bill, scanning for such seabirds as Manx and Balearic Shearwater, skuas and auks, and look for late spring migrants on the headland.

Itinerary

NB. 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 Dorchester, RSPB Radipole and RSPB Lodmoor

Those participants arriving by train will be collected from Dorchester Station (South or West) around 1300 hours, before driving to the nearby hotel, where there will be the opportunity to drop the bags off and meet those arriving by car. The exact timings and arrangements will be given in the final joining instructions. Accommodation for the four days will be in a comfortable, local hotel. After checking in, we will head for the RSPB's Radipole Lake, a reed bed reserve with lagoons positioned in the heart of Weymouth. This urban oasis is packed full of wildlife, and as we walk along the paths we will be listening out for the 'pinging' calls of Bearded Tits, the explosive song of Cetti's Warblers, and the songs of Reed and Sedge Warblers. The bushes and denser habitat will be good for Blackcaps, Whitethroats, and Lesser Whitethroats. Sparrow-like Reed Buntings may pop up at the top of *Phragmites* reed stems, and Marsh Harriers frequently quarter the reed beds with their wings held in a v-shape. The pools will be ideal for Tufted Ducks, Little Grebes, Moorhens, and Coots, while Water Rails may be heard squealing like young piglets.



Bearded Tit

At the RSPB's Lodmoor reserve on the other side of Weymouth, the open water and shingle islands are home to one of the largest Common Tern colonies in the south-west. We will stop here to watch the playful antics of the terns as they settle down to nest. We will also look for Sandwich and Little Terns plus early returning wading birds such as Lapwing, Black-tailed Godwits and Common Sandpipers. The bushes will be worth scanning for Lesser Whitethroat,

Whitethroat, and Stonechat. The marshland and reed beds here are also home to Bearded Tits, Sedge and Reed Warblers, Reed Buntings, Gadwall and Shelduck.

Day 2 Durlston & eastern heaths

Following breakfast we travel to Durlston Country Park and its seabird cliffs, not far from Swanage. We will take time to look through the breeding Guillemot colony, and spot other seabirds such as

Razorbills, Shags and Fulmars. It will also offer the chance to hear and smell a seabird colony if the wind is in the right direction! The cliffs are good for spotting Rock Pipits, Jackdaws, Ravens and Peregrines, while Gannets, shearwaters and terns often pass offshore. The wildflower meadows, with their multi-hued blooms, attract in lots of insects, particularly butterflies, and we will take time to enjoy this lovely habitat.

We will make the short journey north, back towards Wareham, where we will visit some of the heathland areas, and have the opportunity to look for rare reptiles. The warm, acidic soil around the Purbecks forms the perfect heathland habitat for all six of the UK's native reptiles, including the Sand Lizard and the Smooth Snake.

Some of the afternoon will be spent exploring the heathland for birdlife, and perhaps spotting more snakes and lizards. In the nutrient-poor soil, plants need to find food in novel ways – we will spot sundews close to the ground with their round leaves scattered with thin red stalks and sticky droplets at their tips. These carnivorous plants catch small insects using the sticky 'dew' and slowly digest them. As we explore the heathlands we will be looking for Dartford Warblers with their unique scratchy



Sand Lizard

calls, alongside more common species such as Stonechats, Woodlark, Spotted Flycatchers, and possibly hawking Hobbies. Acrobatic fliers, Hobbies are well known to catch and eat dragonflies on the wing and there are a wide variety in the area for them to feed on including Emperor Dragonfly, Downy Emerald, Keeled Skimmer and the rare, delicate Small Red Damselfly. Foxgloves will also be at their best showing off their pink-purple tubular flowers, while the yellow flowers of gorse will have a scent of coconut. Below our feet voracious predators such as Green Tiger Beetles will be foraging, stripy Raft Spiders can be spotted walking across pools of water, and lines of large Wood Ants are hard to miss as they march to and from their nest mounds. Larger herbivorous mammals such as Sika and Roe Deer may also cross our path. The extensive reedbeds around the shoreline are home to Reed Warblers, Reed Buntings and nesting waterbirds such as Shelducks and Redshanks, and out over Poole Harbour we will be alert to the possibility of Common and Sandwich Terns.

After dinner we will head out to the heath and wait for the sun to set. In the late evening light, Nightjars will hopefully begin 'churring' - and when they stop singing it is time to watch for movement as they fly like a kestrel but on lighter wings and silently. Males show patches of white on the tips of their wings, and sometimes make clapping sounds with them as part of their display. Meanwhile, the low light will also draw out bats including the Common and Soprano Pipistrelles

which quickly dash up and down open rides and around bushes, while Britain's largest common bat, the Noctule Bat will be hunting high above.

Day 3

Jurassic Coast



Dartford Warbler

Today we will spend the day exploring the wonderful Jurassic Coast between Chesil Beach and Durlston. It's made up of sandstone, limestone, chalk and clay, each eroding at a different rate to create some stunning coastal landscapes. Fossils can be found along much of this coast line, which produced the famous skeletons of sea dragons known as Ichthyosaurs, found by fossil collector Mary Anning, a little further to the west. We will stop at various points along the coast to look for birds, other wildlife and

perhaps a fossil or two. Our likely destinations will include Durdle Door, Lulworth Cove and Kimmeridge, for Common Seal, Fulmar, Yellowhammer, Corn Bunting and European Stonechat. Further inland is Thomas Hardy country, the area that inspired his literary work, Egdon Heath. Although much of the habitat is now fragmented, we should still find a good number of species, including Dartford Warbler, Hobby, Woodlark, Heath Tiger Beetle, Dorset Heath, various orchid species as well as insectivorous sundews and butterworts. We will find a nice pub or café for a sit-down lunch at some point in the early afternoon

In the early evening we will head out in good time to position ourselves for our evening of Badger watching. There are a number of sites locally where there are well established clans and badger are regularly seen. Your tour leader will make a decision on the best location to visit, depending on the recent badger sightings. We hope to spend at least a couple of hours observing these fantastic nocturnal mammals in their natural habitat. Whilst wildlife sightings can never be guaranteed, we have a good chance of sighting these denizens of the night during the tour. Badgers aren't the only nocturnal creature around, so we will also keep an eye out for owls, foxes and bats.

To sustain us during the evening, we will aim to take a picnic dinner with us that we can eat at leisure while we keep watch.

NB: We are likely to be out for several hours this evening so having some warm clothing with us is essential. There will also not be access toilet facilities for much of the evening.

Day 4

Portland Bill & Chesil Beach

After breakfast we will head for the southern tip of Portland Bill where in May and June shearwaters, auks, and skuas can be spotted offshore. We will pass the southern end of the 18-mile long shingle Chesil Beach, and stop at Ferrybridge where at low tide small waders such as Ringed Plovers can be seen feeding on the lagoon along with fishing Little Terns and Little Egrets. As we drive across the Isle of Portland we will see some of the Portland Stone or oolitic limestone rock that makes up the isle and is still used in the building industry today. The Isle of Portland sticks out into the English Channel and is an ideal location to spot seabirds as they pass by the coastline. Down near the lighthouse, the West Cliffs are home to small numbers of breeding Guillemots, Kittiwakes and Fulmars, while some Puffins and Razorbills may also be present. The large, white forms of Gannets often pass by in ones and twos, while Manx Shearwaters glide low over the waves. Small parties of Common Scoters are not unusual in May and June, while late skuas such as Pomarine Skuas are also possible. Ravens and Peregrines will be fledging young and can often be heard before they are seen. Depending on the weather and migration patterns we may pop into the bird observatory at Portland where thousands of migrating birds are ringed for the British Trust for Ornithology each year. The rocky coastline and bushes are also good for looking for late migrants such as flycatchers and warblers, while Rock Pipits usually nest in the rocks. Around mid-afternoon our tour will come to an end and we will go our separate ways.



Gannet

Weather

We hope for pleasant sunny days but like the rest of Britain, Dorset is subject to unpredictable weather. It would be prudent to be prepared for the possibility of rain, possibly heavy on occasions. We can also expect cooler temperatures during our evening excursions. During the day the reserves we are visiting can get very hot in the sunshine, and the sun's rays can be very strong so a hat and sun cream are highly recommended.

Clothing and equipment

Binoculars are essential. Bring a telescope if you have one, since it will be useful for the sea-watching session. Since it can be muddy underfoot we would suggest you bring walking boots or shoes, and

wellingtons may be useful if the weather looks wet. Please also bring a small torch for the evening walk to the badger watching.

Grading

There will be no serious walking involved, although some days we could cover several miles. It is mostly easy walks on gentle terrain, although on the beaches we may be walking on wet sand and pebbles. Some of the coastal paths along the Jurassic Coast can be steeper and involve some steps, however these will be taken at a relaxed pace.

Accommodation & Food

We will be staying a comfortable, local hotel, near Dorchester. Most rooms have en-suite facilities, however, on occasion, some rooms may share a bathroom.

Breakfast and evening meals are included in the tour price, but pub/ packed lunches and drinks are **not** included.

Arrival/ Departure Details

By Train

We will be able to collect people from either of the Dorchester stations around 1300 hours (further details will be given in final joining instructions sent before the tour). Do not worry if our bus is a few minutes late, parking can be difficult at the stations and it is easier for us if we are sure everyone is together. At the end of the trip, we normally have you back at the stations by 1500hrs.

By Car

If you come by car, you may drive directly to the hotel near Dorchester. Address details will be provided in the final joining instructions sent before the tour. The meeting time will be approximately 1330 hours.

If anyone would like to extend their stay in Dorset, we would be happy to look into the availability of additional nights at the inn for you.

Inclusions / Exclusions

The following costs are included in the price of the holiday:

- Accommodation in a comfortable inn on DBB basis
- Transport from Dorchester
- All guiding
- Excursion costs or entrance fees associated with planned activities

The following costs are **not** included and should be budgeted for:

- Lunches
- Drinks
- Discretionary tipping
- Any other personal spending e.g. souvenirs

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733 051 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 733 051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests, at the time of booking.