

The Isle of Wight in Spring

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

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| Day 1 | Meet Southampton for Red Funnel ferry to East Cowes, Isle of Wight; afternoon Newtown Marshes |
| Day 2 | The Needles, Compton Chine, Sandown and Ventnor |
| Day 3 | Brading Marshes |
| Day 4 | Bridlesford Wood & Firestone Copse, Ferry to Southampton |

Departs

May

Focus

Butterflies, flowers, mammals and general natural history

Grading

A. Easy day walks using coastal paths and downland trails

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code GBR46)

Highlights:

- Waders, wildfowl and estuarine wetlands at Newtown
- Glanville Fritillary, Wall Brown, Dingy and Grizzled Skipper, Small and Adonis Blue butterflies
- Rare coastal wildflowers such as Hoary Stock, Wild Cabbage and Field Cow-wheat, plus early orchids
- Red Squirrels and Hazel Dormouse in the woodlands
- 3-night stay in a comfortable hotel with en-suite bedrooms



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Introduction

The Isle of Wight, known to the ancient Romans as Vectis, is England's largest island. Although separated from the mainland county of Hampshire by a narrow sea channel known as the Solent, 'the island' as it is affectionately known, has an altogether different, gentle pace of life – perfect for a holiday break.

Its southerly location, isolation and geology make it a haven for wildlife, much of which is at the northern limit of its European distribution. The northern part of the island is predominantly formed of impervious clays which give rise to wetlands and marshes such as the island's only National Nature Reserve at Newtown Marshes, home to a variety of waders and wildfowl.

The centre of the island is largely formed of high rolling chalk downlands and large tracts of woodland, whilst the south coast is renowned for its soft and crumbling sedimentary rocks, no more apparent than in the west of the island at Alum Bay, where oxidation of iron in the sandy soils gives rise to colourful strata in the cliffs. Nearby, is the picture-postcard setting of the chalk pinnacles and the lighthouse of The Needles.

Our visit in late spring is timed to give us the best chance of seeing some of the fascinating wildlife that the island has to offer. The central downland belt is home to a good variety of butterflies, including the scarce and beautiful Adonis Blue, plus Small and Common Blues, Green Hairstreak and both Dingy and Grizzled Skippers, whilst we may come across the diminutive Early Gentian a near-endemic British flower.



Green Hairstreak

On the cliffs and chines of the south coast we will look for the rare and delightful Glanville Fritillary butterfly, which occurs here at the northernmost limit of its range. We should also see the Wall Brown, a butterfly that is in dramatic decline on mainland Britain. For those interested in botany, the cliffs and downs have much to admire, from diminutive clovers to showy Yellow-horned Poppies, Wild Cabbage and the mauve Hoary Stock, the latter thought to occur here in one of its few native British sites. Further east, in the area around Ventnor and Sandown, we might find the striking magenta bracts of the rare arable relic, Field Cow-wheat, which is protected here on one of Britain's smallest nature reserves and we will keep an eye out for Wall Lizard, a non-native reptile which thrives in warm, sunny locations such as crumbling walls.



Dingy Skipper

We will also visit the island's extensive woodlands, where we will enjoy a guided walk one morning to look for the secretive Hazel Dormouse. Our fully-licensed local guide will show us the nest boxes that provide daytime shelter for these delightful nocturnal rodents and under his supervision we have a very good chance of seeing this sought-after mammal. We will also look for the native Red Squirrel, which is still isolated here from the competition of non-native Greys that has reduced the population across so

much of Britain. The forest rides are also home to the rare native flower, Narrow-leaved Lungwort and, in places, the parasitic Greater Broomrape.

Based in a comfortable sea-view hotel, we will enjoy these habitats and special species, focusing particularly on the island's rich flora and – provided we get some sunshine- its butterflies.

Itinerary

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and 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

Arrival and Newtown Marsh

Group members will meet up this morning at the Red Funnel ferry terminal in Southampton. Once we have checked-in and transferred our luggage to the minibus(es) we will board the ferry. The crossing to East Cowes should take around an hour. Once on the island we will make a lunch stop at a suitable pub or café before an afternoon visit to Newtown Marshes to look birds and other wildlife. We may see Redshank, Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Common Shelduck and estuarine plant species.

We will then head to our comfortable hotel, the Eversley, overlooking Ventnor Bay in the extreme south of the island, in good time for dinner. Later in the evening your tour leader will outline the programme for the next couple of days.

Day 2

The Needles, Compton Chine, Ventnor

This morning, after breakfast, we will head to the far west of the island to visit Alum Bay, where the soft cliffs are layered with colourful bands of sand and nearby we will gaze upon the row of chalk stacks known as The Needles which jut out into the ocean on the outermost of which stands the iconic red and white lighthouse. Given fair weather we should start to see chalk-loving butterflies such as Small Blue, Green Hairstreak and Glanville Fritillary. The latter is now confined in the UK to the crumbling chalk and sand cliffs along the south coast of the Isle of Wight. Being at the northern edge of its range it has very exacting requirements and needs warm bare ground created by winter land-slips and an abundance of the larval food-plant, Ribwort Plantain.

We will then head east along the south of the island to take in the spectacular views and to explore the cliff-edges and chines (steep-sided river valleys) which hold rich invertebrate and floral communities.



Bastard-toadflax

At Compton Chine, if the weather is favourable, we should see more Glanville Fritillary butterflies as they glide low over the sward seeking out mates or nectar from thistles and daisies. The cliffs should also

provide us with sightings of the Wall Brown, Grizzled Skipper, Small Copper, Small Heath and both Small and Common Blues. Bee Orchid is also possible here.

Nearby, at Afton Down, we can see the kaleidoscopic colours of the cliff-top flora, with the yellows of Wild Cabbage and Yellow-horned Poppy, the pinks of Slender Thistle and Thrift, and the whites of Wild Carrot and Sweet Alison. Along the crumbling cliff-edges we will also find the woody Hoary Stock with its deep mauve blooms. Other interesting plant species to be seen could include Early Gentian, Bastard-toadflax, Hairy-fruited Cornsalad, Clustered Clover and Sea Mouse-ear.



Wall Lizard

Further along the coast we will visit the area around Ventnor. Old walls around the centre of the town are home to the non-native reptile, Wall Lizard and these can often be seen sunning themselves or scuttling about the vertical surfaces. Present since the early 20th century and most probably the result of a deliberate introduction, they have adapted well to the warm island climate.

After lunch, we will visit Bonchurch Down which supports a large population of the stunning Adonis Blue butterfly. If we are blessed with sunny weather we should see this species along with the diminutive Dingy and Grizzled Skippers, Green Hairstreak and Brown Argus.

Nearby, we can visit the tiny nature reserve at St. Lawrence which protects a small population of the Field Cow-wheat, a very rare relic of low-intensity arable farming which begins to flower in June. The spiky magenta bracts over-topping the small two-lipped yellow flowers make this a most attractive plant. Its rarity is due in part to its unpopularity with early farmers who knew it as the 'poverty weed' as it discoloured and affected the taste of the flour produced from their corn. As a result, it was ruthlessly pulled from their fields.



Field Cow-wheat

Day 3

Brading Marshes



Purple Broomrape

This morning we will head to the RSPB reserve at Brading Marshes, a beautiful valley that spans the lower reaches of the River Yar before it disgorges into the sea at Bembridge Harbour. Here we may find Cetti's, Reed and Sedge Warblers, Yellow Wagtail and Lapwing, with the possibility of more unusual species such as Marsh Harrier and Hobby.

The rest of the day will be spent catching up with anything we have missed so far which may include the small reserve at Arreton Cross which gives us a chance to see the strange Purple Broomrape, a plant totally without chlorophyll, which is parasitic on the roots of Yarrow. Knotted and Clustered Clover are also found here.

Day 4

Briddlesford Wood & Firestone Copse

This morning we will visit the magnificent Briddlesford Woods. Owned and sensitively managed by the People's Trust for Endangered Species, and designated as both a SSSI and SAC, Briddlesford is the largest remaining ancient semi-natural woodland on the Island, and a veritable wildlife haven. Some very exciting species can be found here, including Red Squirrel, Barbastelle and Bechstein's Bats, Narrow-leaved Lungwort, an array of butterflies and moths and a plethora of woodland birds. Today, however, our target species will be the iconic Hazel Dormouse. We will learn all about this wonderful woodland from our host Ian White, PTES's Dormouse Officer, before checking a number of nest boxes, with our fingers crossed for sights and signs of this truly special species.



Hazel Dormouse



Red Squirrel

Finally, we will visit Firestone Copse where on the forest rides we should find the rare native plant, Narrow-leaved Lungwort, a member of the borage family with sharply-pointed, white-spotted leaves. The terminal clusters of flowers change colour from pink to purple as they age

In the afternoon we will return to East Cowes to catch the return ferry to Southampton where the tour will conclude.

Weather

Although the Isle of Wight enjoys a very mild climate in early June, there is still the chance of rain or blustery winds, so participants should be prepared for all eventualities from heavy rain to warm sunshine! We hope for the latter but wet conditions can occur in June. Walking boots, layered clothing and a waterproof jacket are essential.

Accommodation & food

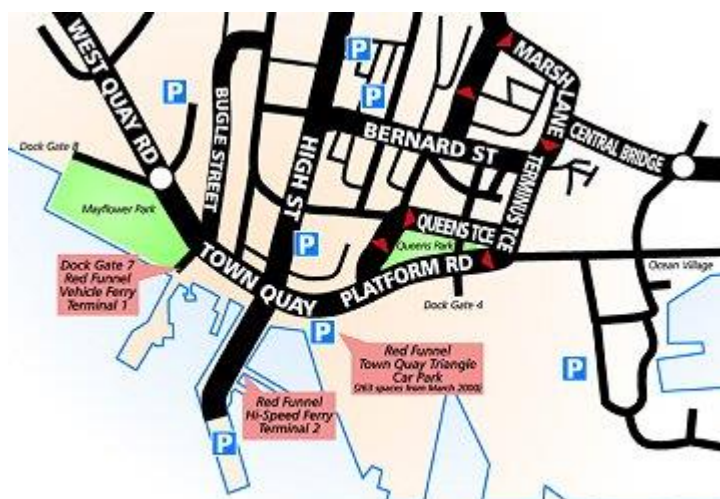
We will be based in the south of the island at the characterful and comfortable, family-run, Eversley Hotel just west of Ventnor. Perched on the cliffs above Ventnor Bay the hotel offers a private cliff-top garden and heated outdoor swimming pool. All rooms have private facilities. The holiday cost is calculated on the basis of sharing a twin room, but a limited number may be available for single-occupancy at a supplementary cost.

Breakfast and evening meals are included in the tour price but lunches are **not** included. Depending on the weather we will either stop to purchase packed lunches or will eat in a local café or pub.

Travel to Southampton

The Red Funnel vehicle/passenger ferry departs from Terminal 1 Dockgate 7 off Town Quay Road (SO14 2AL). If travelling by rail the nearest station is Southampton Central with services provided by South West Trains, First Great Western, Cross Country and Southern. CityLink, a free shuttle bus, operates every 15 minutes between the south side of the station and Red Funnel's ferry terminals on Town Quay. Approximate journey time: 10 minutes.

If travelling by car, short/medium stay parking is available at the Triangle Car Park on Town Quay Road, a 5-minute walk from the ferry terminal. The tariff is around £16 per 24 hours but can be cheaper if pre-booked online. Please note that the car park operates an automated payment system which requires a mobile phone and debit/credit card. If you do not have access to a mobile phone then please park your car and proceed to the Red Funnel Ticket Office, where someone will be able to assist you. The ticket office is open from 7am to 7pm



Please ensure that you are at the ferry terminal at least one hour before the scheduled sailing time so that we can organise the transfer of luggage etc to the minibus.

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.