

The Best of England

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Meet London; transfer East Anglia
Day 2/3	Excursions around East Anglia
Day 4	Transfer to Teesdale
Day 5/6	Pennines
Day 7	Farne Islands, transfer Edinburgh
Day 8	Depart Edinburgh

Departs

May or June

Focus

Birds and other natural history

Grading

A. Easy day walks only.

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code GBR61) or brochure

Highlights:

- Explore a fantastic array of habitats & discover a diverse range of species.
- Visit some of England's best bird reserves.
- Spectacular seabird colonies including Puffin & Gannet.
- Upland species such as Ring Ouzel, Merlin and Red & Black Grouse.
- Boat trip to the Farne Islands where thousands of seabirds breed.
- Discover the historic heart of Edinburgh.



From top: Avocet, Atlantic Puffin & Black Grouse. (Images courtesy of Shutterstock)



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Introduction

When thinking about a birdwatching tour to England one question you may be asking yourself is "Where do I start?" or "How should I best use my time?"! We have asked ourselves these very questions and believe that this tour delivers some of the very best birdwatching on offer with the opportunity for such a great range of species. During this new seven night tour, based in first class perfectly located rural hotels, a superb range of habitat types will be visited with a wonderful array of birds and wildlife on offer with a little culture included too. These tours have been designed to appeal to those visiting England from abroad or those wishing to experience an excellent cross section of what is on offer here.

Meeting at Heathrow, our first destination is East Anglia, famous for its broads, fens, wetlands and marshes where we will search out wading birds and Marsh Harrier. Further inland the woodlands are home to Nuthatch, Treecreeper and the occasional Nightingale, while the farmlands may yield Turtle Dove. Moving north we will break up the journey with a stop or two at nature reserves. Once in the north our focus will shift to upland species such as Red & Black Grouse, Ring Ouzel and Common Redstart. Returning to the coast we will journey out to the Farne Islands where thousands of seabirds breed each year in amazingly noisy colonies. Our journey will finish across the border in Scotland, culminating in the historic capital, Edinburgh.



Marsh Harrier

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 London, transfer East Anglia

Today we will meet at Heathrow Airport and once the group are gathered travel by minibus to Suffolk and our base for the first 3 nights. Arriving in the early evening we may have time for a quick look on the heathland near our hotel before dinner where species may include Common Whitethroat, Linnet, Yellowhammer, Woodlark and Stonechat to name but a few. We shall settle in to our hotel, with superb habitat on the doorstep, and enjoy a meal before getting some well-earned rest.



Common Redshank

Day 2-3

East Anglia

For our first full day here we will focus mainly on the RSPB Minsmere Reserve, made famous by the well-known BBC Springwatch series. Starting with a pre-breakfast walk, we'll take in the dawn chorus as we follow the track to the island mere where there is a hide allowing great views over the mere. Minsmere holds a wide range of breeding wetland birds, including Bittern, Marsh Harrier, Sedge Warbler, Bearded Tit and Pied Avocet. At this time of year, there is also an excellent likelihood of migrants; early arctic species that have failed this year will be starting to return. Little and Temminck's Stints, Spotted Redshank, Greenshank, Ruff, Black-tailed Godwit, Garganey and Little Gull are all spring regulars, although at this time of year almost anything is



Bearded Tit

possible. A little further along is another hide that is good for Bittern. With some patience we hope to see one of these illusive birds and hear their booming call responding through the reeds.



Eurasian Bittern

Having returned to hotel for breakfast and fueled up for the day, we'll head back out to the Minsmere reserve, stopping at the visitor's centre, before continuing on to the scrapes, reed beds and grasslands that make up some of the wetter habitats as we watch for waders and breeding

birds. Wading species may include Grey Plover, Ringed Plover, Greenshank, Common Redshank, Little Egret, Pied Avocet, Eurasian Oystercatchers and Dunlin while passerines could include Stonechat and Whinchat while Wheatears may be passing through and at this time of year rare vagrants are always a possibility; Black-winged Stilts, Temminck's Stint or a Black Kite perhaps! In addition to the waders and water birds, hobby hunt for insects above the water while migrating birds are attracted in to scrub and wet grasslands. There is also a colony of breeding Kittiwakes that, unusually, use the scrape rather than a cliff face.

After taking lunch at the visitor's centre, we will go in search of any species that has been reported over the course of the morning that we may not yet have seen. Alternatively you may wish to return to a favourite spot to spend a little longer there.



Nightingale

For those who still have energy, there will be the possibility of heading out again in the evening in the hopes of finding a singing Nightingale. Now an incredibly rare sound, there are still some places nearby where they can be heard.

The following day we will return to Minsmere reserve, to the drier areas that contain heathland or woodland species, including Woodlark, Stone Curlew, Firecrest, Dartford Warbler, Tree Pipit, and Crossbill. Minsmere's 1,000 or so acres provide a mosaic of habitat that attracts in a wide range of species, and in summer it will be alive with a great variety of birds racing to raise this year's brood in time.

Another evening there will be the option to head out to a local heathland to listen, and look, for European Nightjar. This fairly small bird produces an amazingly loud vocalisation known as churring, which is incredible to hear, particularly if there are several calling males all in the area. If we're fortunate we may also spot a hunting barn owl over the fields and marshes.

Day 4

Transfer from East Anglia to Teesdale

Today we will begin making our way north. Leaving East Anglia behind, there are several different reserves that we can stop at to break up the journey, depending on the traffic and the weather. These may include RSPB Frampton, a salt marsh area where many waders can be found, including Greenshank, Ruff, Spotted Redshank and Little Stint. Potteric Carr Nature Reserve is best known for Bittern and Marsh Harrier, RSPB Fairburn Ings is likely to have young herons and egrets looking for their next meal along the water's edge, while RSPB St Aidan's Common Tern and Black-headed Gull nest. We'll likely only stop at one, maybe two, of these reserves as we have quite a long distance to cover today. If it is an exceptionally fine day we may instead choose to take the coastal route up to Bempton Cliffs where seabirds such as Puffin, Gannet and Guillemot nest in huge numbers.



We shall arrive at our hotel in time for dinner in the uplands of England and the wild Pennines.

Day 5-6

Pennines



During the next two days, and subject to the weather, we will aim to find a variety of traditional wildlife in this region. On one day we will make a very early start to allow us to arrive at a Black Grouse lek. The sight and sound of these special birds displaying is sure to be a real highlight of our tour. The males gather at dawn when they display by fanning out their white undertail feathers and lyre-shaped outer-tail feathers, while posturing, flutter-jumping and continually producing bubbling sounds. 'Lek' comes from the Old Norse for 'play' but it is a serious business, with males battling for territory and to secure matings.

Following this we shall take more relaxed walks in the area searching mature woodland nearby for Pied Flycatcher, Redstart, Wood Warbler and Spotted Flycatcher and another flora and fauna we may come across.

The hay meadows are where Ring Ouzel, Wheatear, Lapwing and Golden Plover may be seen as they all breed here. Higher ground around here such as that at Cronkley Fell, where the limestone outcrops overlie the Great Whin Sill, is where Red Grouse can be found.

We shall explore the local area here with relaxed walks exploring the woodlands, rivers and more open moorland with Short-eared Owl, Merlin, Dipper, Grey Wagtail and Curlews all possible.



Day 7

Depart Pennines, transfer to Lothian

Today we shall leave our hotel early and drive to Seahouses for a wonderful boat trip around the world famous Farne Islands. During the breeding season, this group of islands is considered by



some to provide one of the great birding spectacles of the world. Here you are able to see congregations of sea birds at close quarters including Common Guillemot, Razorbill, Puffin, Shag and Arctic Tern. (This boat trip is subject to local sea conditions).

After the visit, we will continue our drive along the Northumberland coast passing Bamburgh Castle and the medieval monastery of Lindisfarne before crossing the border into Scotland at the town of Berwick-upon-Tweed. As we approach Edinburgh we will be able to see the famous stack of Bass Rock. This famous gannetry gives its name to the species name of the Northern Gannet - *Morus bassanus*.

We'll overnight in a comfortable hotel near Edinburgh.

Day 9

Depart Edinburgh

There should be time for a final bird walk this morning before we make our way to Edinburgh. Should travelling arrangements permit, we will aim to spend at least part of the morning in Edinburgh, to savour the culture and tourist hot spots of this historic city before we must all head off on our separate ways. There is much to see in Scotland's capital city and an extension in Edinburgh can also be easily arranged. Some suggestions of places to visit are detailed below. At the end of the tour transfers to the airport or train station for onward journeys home will be provided. Unless of course you are continuing in Scotland with us!



Images courtesy of Shutterstock

Tour grading

Grade A. We will undertake some walks, though none of them will be particularly long or strenuous (any longer walks will be optional). The tour is therefore suitable for all ages and for all degrees of fitness, though it will involve early optional starts each day, and late finishes.

Arrival / departure details

We anticipate that some of the group will arrive into London Heathrow and so this will be our first meeting point. We will then travel to East Anglia, where group members can also meet at Saxmundham Station. Exact timings will be confirmed in the tour final joining instructions, but are likely to be as follows: 1130 hours at London Heathrow Airport and 1430 hours at Saxmundham Station. At the end of the tour we expect to arrive at Edinburgh Waverly Station by 1245 hours and Edinburgh Airport by 1300 hours. Those departing by air or rail from Edinburgh should arrange flights or trains to depart after these times. As flight and train timings do vary from year to year, we would ask you to contact the Naturetrek office before booking travel arrangements that are unlikely to fit in with the timings mentioned above.

By Train

We meet you at London Heathrow Airport at 1130hrs at the beginning of the trip (further details will be given in joining instructions sent before the tour) Do not worry if our bus is a few minutes late, parking is difficult near the station and it is easier for us if we are sure everyone is together. At the end of the trip, we normally have you at Edinburgh Waverly Station by 1245 hours.

It would also be possible for you to meet the group in Saxmundham if you would prefer. Details of the meeting times will be provided in the final joining instructions for the tour, but we would suggest making sure that you are in Saxmundham by approximately 1430 hours to ensure that you have plenty of time to meet the group.

By Bus

If you arrive by bus at Heathrow Bus Station, you can walk the short distance to Heathrow Terminal, and meet the tour vehicle here.

By Air

We can meet you at London Heathrow Airport at 1130 hours. Exact meeting details will be provided in the final joining instructions as these will depend on everyone's arrival plans. The tour vehicle can only wait here for a limited time, so please worry if our bus is a few minutes late; it is easier for us if we are sure everyone is together before arriving.

At the end of the tour we anticipate a drop off at Edinburgh Airport at approximately 1300 hours.

By Car

If you come by car, you may drive directly to Heathrow and leave your vehicle in a car park here. At the end of the tour a return flight from Edinburgh will get you back to Heathrow.

Edinburgh

If you have sufficient time in Edinburgh, you may wish to visit Edinburgh Castle, an impressive landmark that showcases an amazing collection of crown jewels, hosts the Scottish National War Museum and carries on the tradition of the one o'clock gun. It is easily reached on foot from the city centre. There is also the Palace of Holyrood and the Royal Mile that can be explored, as well as Arthur's Seat, an extinct volcano that offers up a fantastic view across the city for those with some energy.

Another royal connection is the Royal Yacht Britannia, now moored at Leith. The National Museum of Scotland opened in 2011, including archeology, geology, art, science and natural history in the same building or for those with an interest in plants there is the Royal Botanical Gardens.

We can also offer some additional recommendations for those who would like to visit Edinburgh for a longer period of time.

Accommodation in Heathrow

If you arrive the night before the trip then we suggest the following hotels:

Radisson Blu Edwardian, Heathrow

140 Bath Road, Harlington, Hayes. UB3 5AW

020 8759 6311 <https://www.radissonhotels.com/en-us/hotels/radisson-blu-edwardian-london-heathrow>

Leonardo Hotel

Bath Road, Sipson, West Drayton. UB7 0DP

020 8990 0000 <https://www.leonardohotels.co.uk/hotels/london/leonardo-hotel-london-heathrow-airport>

Hilton Garden Inn London Heathrow Terminals 2&3

Heathrow Airport, Terminal 2, Inner Ring E, Longford, Hounslow. TW6 1AH

020 3972 9700 <https://www.hilton.com/en/hotels/lhrhegi-hilton-garden-inn-london-heathrow-terminals-2-and-3>

Sheraton Heathrow Hotel

Heathrow Airport, Colnbrook By-Pass, Harmondsworth, West Drayton. UB7 0HJ

020 8759 2424 <https://www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/lhrsi-sheraton-heathrow-hotel>

Hotel Sofitel London Heathrow

Terminal 5 London Heathrow Airport, Southampton Road, Longford, Hounslow. TW6 2GD

020 8757 7777 <https://all.accor.com/hotel/6214/index.en.shtml>

Accommodation in Edinburgh

If you want to stay the night at the end of your trip, then we suggest the following hotels:

Convenient for Waverly Station (5-10min walk away):

The Scotsman Hotel

20 North Bridge, Edinburgh. EH1 1TR

0131 556 5565 <https://scotsmanhotel.co.uk>

The Balmoral

1 Princes Street, Edinburgh. EH2 2EQ

0131 556 2414 <https://www.roccofortehotels.com/hotels-and-resorts/the-balmoral-hotel>

Radisson Blue Hotel, Edinburgh City Centre

The Royal Mile, 80 High Street, Edinburgh. EH1 1TH

0131 557 9797 <https://www.radissonhotels.com/en-us/hotels/radisson-blu-edinburgh>

If you would prefer smaller, boutique-style accommodation then we suggest the following, which are situated up to 1½ miles from Waverly Station:

The Inn on The Mile

82 High Street, Edinburgh. EH1 1LL

0131 556 9940 <https://www.theinnonthemile.co.uk/>

Nira Caledonia

6-10 Gloucester Place, Edinburgh. EH3 6EF

0131 225 2720 <https://www.niracaledonia.com/>

The Glasshouse Hotel

2 Greenside Place, Edinburgh. EH1 3AA

0131 5254 8200 <https://www.theglasshousehotel.co.uk/>

The Place Hotel

34-38 York Place, Edinburgh. EH1 3HU

0131 556 7575 <https://yorkplace-edinburgh.co.uk/>

Eden Locke, George Street

127 George Street, Edinburgh. EH2 4JN

0131 526 4190 <https://lockeliving.com/eden-locke/>

No11

11 Brunswick Street, Edinburgh. EH7 5JB

0131 557 6910 <https://www.11brunswickst.co.uk/>

The Witchery by the Castle

352 Castlehill, Edinburgh. EH1 2NF

0131 225 5613 <https://www.thewitchery.com/>

Alternatively take a look at options on www.tripadvisor.co.uk

Food & accommodation

For this holiday all breakfasts and dinners are included, however lunches will be taken at various local pubs and cafes and will be at your own expense. After a hearty breakfast lunches will be kept fairly brief and light in order to maximise our time in the field. Snacks and water will be carried with us to keep us going! Our hotels are very comfortable and perfectly located.

Weather

At this time of year, the weather can range from moderately warm sunshine to wet and windy. We may get very mixed conditions on the same day! You should therefore bring a mixture of clothing including warm fleeces, jackets, hats and gloves. Walking boots, or good waterproof walking shoes, would be useful for some of the walks.

Inclusions/ Exclusions

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

- Accommodation in comfortable hotels on DBB basis
- Transport from Heathrow to Edinburgh
- All guiding
- Reserve Entrance tickets

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 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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