Dorset - South Coast Migration Special

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline Itinerary

Day 1  Arrive Corfe Castle and St Aldhelm’s Head.

Day 2/3  Birding excursions from Corfe Castle.

Departs
October

Focus
Birds and other natural history

Grading
A. All walking will be at a slow birdwatching pace over mostly flat ground.

Dates and Prices
See website (tour code GBR63) or brochure

Highlights
• Stay in an award-winning Elizabethan manor house hotel, serving delicious cuisine.
• Join a ringing session at Durlston NNR and enjoy moth trap opening.
• Enjoy the wonderful views of the rugged Jurassic Coast.
• Experience the exciting birding at Portland Bird Observatory.
• A chance for Eurasian Otter
• Led by an expert Naturetrek naturalist.

Bearded Tit, Eurasian Spoonbill and Convolvulus Hawk-moth
Introduction

The long distance migration of birds is a truly remarkable feat and certainly one of the real wonders of the natural world. On this short wildlife break we will explore some of Dorset’s best nature reserves and enjoy its beautiful coastline and countryside from the perfect, centrally positioned base, a delightful 16th century Elizabethan manor hotel in Corfe Castle.

Dorset’s enviable variety of special habitats offers a wealth of natural history for us to enjoy and during this exciting and varied weekend break this phenomenon will be at the forefront of our minds as we explore some of Dorset’s finest nature reserves watching for migrant birds and learning about them as we go. We shall watch from headlands, join a bird ringing session, visit a world famous bird observatory, cruise across Poole harbour and also open some moth traps. All this will be coupled with some superb hospitality and delicious meals.

In addition to the exciting birds possible, the area has a flourishing population of Otters and although typically nocturnal, groups have been lucky enough to see this gorgeous animal as it continues to bounce back across the UK. On the cruise we should obtain good views of the wonderful Grey Seal. Sika Deer are also likely to be seen whilst on foot and on the short drives between locations.

Butterflies are still possible at this time of year and previous groups have seen several including Large White, Painted Lady and Speckled Wood.

Mixed waders and wildfowl in Poole Harbour
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 Corfe Castle and St Aldhelm’s Head

We will be based at the very comfortable and charming Mortons Manor in the picturesque town of Corfe Castle. You may check in from 1400 before meeting your leader at reception at 1430 for a short briefing before heading out for the first excursion. The exact timings and arrangements will be given in the final instructions.

With everyone gathered and introductions made it will be time to head out for the afternoon for our first exploration of the area and visiting nearby St Aldhelm’s head will be a likely first site. We shall walk along the coastal path at this scenic limestone headland watching out for migrant birds as we go and enjoying the special views of the Jurassic coast. The headland here is the most southerly point of the Purbeck peninsula and affords some wonderful coastline and ocean views. Migrants may include Wheatear, Whinchat, migrant thrushes, and perhaps some birds moving over the sea with Arctic and Great Skua possible along with auks and divers. We may make it along to Winspit which also holds great potential for finding migrants and it is sure to be an excellent initial exploration. We shall then return for or first delicious dinner.

Days 2 - 3

Across the next two days we will enjoy a great range and variety of activities across a variety of habitats to make this a most exciting birdwatching break.

The order and exact sites to be visited will be kept flexible to best maximise our time and on both days we shall break for lunch at a local pub or café. The below gives examples of some of the sites we shall visit and your leader, who knows the area very well, will make decisions during the tour on where to go next.

On the final day you will return to the hotel at around 5.30pm.

Durlston National Nature Reserve

On one morning we shall visit Durlston National Nature Reserve to join the local Stour ringing group as they monitor and record the migrant birds that pass through this excellent site. All the
ringing here is carried out by trained experts and all ads to our understanding and learning of migration and species trends. Species caught may include various warblers with Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps common and Grasshopper Warbler also regularly finding the net. Finches which may include such species as Brambling and Linnet may appear in the net and with birds moving at this time of year anything can be found. With the right conditions, which always requires that element of luck, this site is capable of really excellent “falls” of migrants and it will be exciting to discover what has been caught. We will learn about the species and whether they are scarce or common it is always special to study birds close up in the hand and learn about them.

We shall also open two moth traps here to see what we can find with this site very good for migrant moths as well as birds. Moths seem previously on this tour including the amazing Convolvulus Hawk-moth, Beautiful Gothic, *Palpita vitrealis* and many more.

Following this we shall enjoy a tour of the reserve and headland with the cliffs being good for spotting Rock Pipits, Ravens and Peregrines, while Gannets, shearwaters and terns often pass offshore.

**Poole Harbour**

We will take a Ferry across from Studland to Poole Harbour and enjoy visiting sites close to here which may include Holes Bay and Lychett Fields. This will provide us with the opportunity to observe a range of wildfowl, waders and raptors with Spoonbill, Spotted Redshank, Brent Geese, Marsh Harrier and many more species possible. The saltmarsh and intertidal mudflats at Holes Bay are a haven for wetland birds who are here to feed on the rich invertebrate life of Poole Harbour’s mud. Redshank, Oystercatcher, Curlew, and Avocet maybe found while Teal, Wigeon and Red-breasted Merganser may be on the water. Black-tailed Godwit and Spoonbill can also be seen here and Kingfisher also a regular.

The RSPB reserve at Lytchett Fields is another premier site with a whole host of migrant waders and wildfowl in particular being possible here. We will be reacting to any local bird news and sites chosen will be done so to maximise our chance of special sightings and to maximise our enjoyment of course.

**Portland Bird Observatory**

We shall visit the wonderful Portland bird observatory and enjoy birding at various locations around this famous site. As we drive across to 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 with this unique location it means it’s an ideal location for migrants to make landfall and pass indeed through. It is also excellent for watching seabirds as they pass close by the coastline.

We will visit the observatory itself where thousands of migrating birds are ringed for the British Trust for Ornithology every year and we shall react to any news of scare or rare migrants that may be around for us to enjoy. At this time of year many birds will be passing through on their way back into Europe and beyond and rarities from Europe, America and Asia turn up with regularity! Firecrests, Black Redstarts, Ring Ouzels or perhaps a Yellow-browed Warbler or Red-breasted Flycatcher may be found and birding at a site such as this can be very exciting indeed and we will visit the hotspots and enjoy whatever we may find!

Offshore can also be very productive with Great and Arctic Skua, Great Northern and Red-throated Divers and various grebes and wildfowl regularly recorded with Purple Sandpipers wintering here.

**RSPB Radipole Lake and RSPB Lodmoor**

We will visit the RSPB’s Radipole Lake, a reedbed 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, which are more noticeable at this time of year, and the explosive song of Cetti’s Warblers, while Marsh Harriers frequently quarter the reedbeds with their wings held in a v-shape. The pools are ideal for Tufted Ducks, Little Grebes and various gulls visit here while Water Rails may be heard squealing in the reeds. At this time of year the water level is lowered for the reed cutting management and the exposed mud is excellent for attracting waders such as Snipe, Redshank, Dunlin and Lapwing. Otters can be seen here and previous groups have been fortunate to see them on the trip.

At the RSPB’s Lodmoor reserve on the other side of Weymouth, the open water, shingle islands and reedbeds are again home to an excellent range of species. Again wading birds such as Lapwing, Black-tailed Godwits and Redshank can be found while in the bay there may be wintering Black-necked and Slavonian Grebe and possibly Great-Northern Diver.
Tour Grading & Focus

There will be easy walking on this holiday, covering between two and four miles per day, at a slow birdwatching pace, on flat ground, and will be interspersed with time spent in hides, centres and at the observatory. The majority of time is spent birdwatching but we will take time to appreciate mammals, moths, dragonflies, plants, and any other interesting wildlife we come across.

Weather, Clothing & Equipment

The weather is of course unpredictable and we recommend bringing layers of clothing including a warm jumper/fleece and a waterproof jacket and waterproof walking boots. We will be out in the field for long periods and with the possibility of sun and wind a hat is recommended. Binoculars are required for the tour. A telescope will be very useful if you have one.

What’s Included

We will be staying in the excellent Mortons Manor with private facilities in each room. Breakfast and two course evening meals are included in the holiday price. Pub lunches and drinks are not included and offers a choice between something light or a hearty pub lunch.

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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