

Somerset's Summer Wildlife

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Arrive Somerset
Day 2	Quantock Hills
Day 3	Avalon Marshes & Polden Hills
Day 4	Mendip Hills

Departs

June

Focus

Birds, butterflies & other wildlife. A very broad focus.

Grading

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

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code GBR73) or brochure

Highlights

- A wide variety of species studied.
- Large Blue and other uncommon butterflies.
- Pied Flycatcher, Bearded Tit and Hobby all possible.
- Numerous orchids and other specialist plants.
- Bat detecting with Greater and Lesser Horseshoe species possible.



From top; Bearded Tit, Large Blue, Somerset Levels



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Introduction

Somerset offers some of the most spectacular and internationally recognised habitats and wildlife in the UK including 124 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), 2 Special Protection Areas, 11 Special Areas of Conservation and 4 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). During this wonderfully varied short break we will visit a number of these beautiful areas and enjoy a range of the iconic and rare species which thrive in the counties wetlands, meadows, gorges and marshes. Large Blue butterfly, Bittern, Lesser Horseshoe Bat, Great White Egret, Red Deer, Otter, Round-leaved Sundew and Cheddar Pink provide just a selection of the diversity found throughout the county.

Our accommodation is located within easy striking distance of the key habitats of the Somerset Levels, an area which supports such a rich variety of plant, insect and birdlife that it is under consideration for status as a World Heritage Site. Sites we shall visit include the Quantock Hills, Steart Peninsula, Avalon Marshes, Brean Down, Cheddar Gorge and the Mendip Hills among others. Pied Flycatcher, Wood Warbler, Redstart, Cuckoo, Whinchat and Dartford Warbler are just some delights in the woodlands and heathlands; while Bearded Tit, Marsh Harrier, Hobby and a range of breeding warblers will be enjoyed on the waterways and reedbeds of the famous Somerset Levels. Superb limestone downland hold a wealth of butterflies including the rare and localised Large Blue. Dark Green Fritillary, Brown Argus, Dingy and Grizzled Skipper are other targets with the accompanying flora including Greater Butterfly, Pyramidal, Common Spotted and Bee Orchid, while White Rock Rose, Dwarf Sedge and Somerset Hair Grass are three rare plants we hope to find. As darkness falls there is more to enjoy and we shall take a trip a local spot in the Mendip Hills one evening for a bat walk where we have a good chance of both Greater and Lesser Horseshoe and possibly Barbastelle bats, while back in the comfort of our hotel we will put out a moth trap for the chance to see some of the nocturnal lepidoptera gems that reside here.



Bee Orchid

We are set for a fascinating and wide insight into the wonderful natural history right on our doorstep.

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 Somerset

Your tour leader(s), will meet you at our hotel base in Somerset. Please be there in time for an afternoon excursion starting at around 3.30pm. In the evening, your leader will give you a short introductory talk outlining the programme for the coming days, and some of the wildlife we will hope to see, before enjoying our first meal together. After dinner we will head out into the hotel gardens to set the moth trap, taking the bat detector with us to detect any species which may be feeding in the darkness overhead.

Day 2

Quantock Hills and Steart Marshes

This morning there is the opportunity to search through the moth trap before breakfast. After a hearty and delicious breakfast we shall head to the wonderful Quantock Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Here we shall search the heathland and woodland habitats for Pied Flycatcher,



Black-tailed Skimmer

Wood Warbler, Redstart, as well as studying the botanical and invertebrate life here. The Quantock Hills offer scenic beauty and upland nature, as well as interesting geology.

After a welcome pub lunch, we will head to Steart Marshes, the biggest new coastal wetland in Britain with the tidal area alone being nearly 3km long and over 1km wide. Here we will search the brackish and freshwater habitats for Avocet,

Little Ringed Plover, Lapwing, Shelduck and hirundines. Odonata may include the amazing duo of Black-tailed Skimmer and Emperor, and plants we hope to find include Flowering Rush and Purple Loosestrife.

Day 3

Avalon Marshes & Polden Hills

Willow trees and the now converted flooded peat-diggings are characteristic of the landscape here, and the resulting wetland pools and reedbeds provide superb habitat for wildfowl, waders, and herons. There are tracks running alongside many of these habitats, and there should be plenty of bird activity as we stop at a scrape, viewing point or a lakeside hide. Indeed, spring is an excellent time for birdlife on the Somerset Levels and our visit in June is timed to coincide with the breeding season. The number and variety of passage waders depends on water levels, but we can expect

small flocks of waders, and we may see migrating summer plumaged Black-tailed Godwits, as well as a few Ruff and Little Ringed Plover among other commoner species such as Lapwings and Redshank.

June is also one of the best times to watch one of the area's special birds, the Hobby. These exquisite falcons congregate over certain lakes to take advantage of the abundance of prey – in particular the vast numbers of dragonflies which are emerging at this time of year – and it is possible to see over 40 in the air together. It is worth keeping a careful eye out for Bitterns – their cryptic plumage never makes them easy to see but our chances are good as they make frequent feeding flights across reedbeds at this time of year. The large winter congregations of wildfowl which assemble in the lakes and pools have gone by spring, but we can hope to find Garganey among Mallard and Gadwall. Little and Great Egrets can be seen throughout the year with Cattle Egret also possible now, and Marsh Harriers are often seen patrolling the reedbeds and marshes for prey. As we bird the levels and moors we'll be constantly on the alert for the explosive call of the Cetti's Warbler, one of the most distinctive and easily recognisable bird songs of the Avalon Marshes and we will listen out for the characteristic 'squealing' of Water Rail as well as Cuckoos, which are still doing well here. We can expect up to 10 species of warbler to be present by mid to late June including Reed and Sedge Warbler, Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Whitethroat and Lesser Whitethroat, Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler, and there will be a chance for those interested in learning some bird song to practice their identification skills – either during the day or as an optional dawn chorus walk.

After a hearty pub lunch we head to the Polden Hills which are bestowed with a richness of natural beauty. In June, a wealth of wildflowers and wildlife will be awaiting us, including the beautiful and fascinating Large Blue butterfly.

In the evening we will make a visit to the Mendip Hills, where we hope to detect Lesser and Greater Horseshoe bats, both species are considered by The Bat Conservation Trust to be endangered. The Mendip Hills support significant populations of both species. Greater Horseshoe bats are now considered to be restricted to less than 20 roosts in the whole of the UK. Barbastelle bats will also be possible here.



Greater Horseshoe Bat

Day 4

Mendip Hills

Today we head to the Mendip Hills and Cheddar Gorge. Cheddar Gorge is a significant site of ecological importance and is classified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) with an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The mosaic of habitats here include calcareous grassland, cliffs, caves and woodland, supports flora and fauna of both UK and European significance. We will enjoy the site tremendously and will hope to find such key species as Peregrine Falcon, the Cheddar Pink, Roe deer, Orchids and, if the weather is suitable, basking Common Lizard, Adder and Grass Snake.

We will finish our Somerset tour in the late afternoon, in time to arrive back to our hotel in the early evening at around 1700. An extra night can be booked at the hotel and please let the Naturetrek office know if you would like this and we shall get back to you to confirm availability and with a cost for Bed & Breakfast or including Dinner too.

Tour Grading & Focus

There will be some easy walking on this holiday, covering around four miles per day on generally flat but varied terrain. We will maintain a very broad focus and enjoy everything we are lucky enough to find.

Train station collection and drop off

It may be possible for the tour leader to collect and drop off clients wishing to travel by train from the following stations. Please mention this at the time of booking.

Collections can be made from Weston Super Mare train station, Weston Milton train station or Worle train station.

Weather, Clothing & Equipment

In June temperatures should be comfortable, and can sometimes be surprisingly hot; however we will be in exposed in many places, it is always advisable to take layers and prepare for cold or warm weather. Waterproof clothing and sturdy – preferably waterproof or water-resistant – footwear is recommended in case of showers, as we could get caught in rain away from shelter. We strongly advise high factor sun cream (even if it is raining!) and a hat.

You should bring warm clothing for the evening bat excursion, and for the evenings mosquito repellent is advisable. Binoculars are very much advised for the tour, and a torch may be useful for our bat excursion. A telescope and bat detector will be very useful, if you have one.

What's Included

Breakfasts and evening meals are included in the holiday cost beginning with the evening meal on Day 1 and finishing with breakfast on Day 4.

Lunches, and daytime snacks and drinks, are not included in the cost of this tour, and you will be responsible for making your own way to and from the hotel at the start and end of the tour. We will stop at a lovely local pub for lunch and a comfort break on all three full days.

Accommodation

Our hotel will be at the lovely Batch County House near Weston-Super-Mare. All rooms are en-suite. If requesting a twin room, this comes with an additional charge of £80 per person. A single room supplement is also applicable to all solo travellers.

Extending Your Holiday

We are more than happy to book additional nights at the hotel on a bed and breakfast basis at additional cost. Please request this at the time of booking.

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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