

# Go Slow in Dorset

## Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

---

### Outline itinerary

<b>Day 1</b>	Arrive Wareham & transfer to Corfe Castle
<b>Days 2-6</b>	Daily Excursions around Dorset
<b>Day 7</b>	Morning Excursion & Depart

### Departs

June or July

### Dates and Prices

See website (tour code GBR76)

### Grading

A. Easy day walks and optional evening excursions

### Focus

Birds, butterflies, reptiles and other natural history

### Highlights

- Visiting the Jurassic Coast, a World Heritage Site
- Look for all 6 of Britain's reptile species in the Purbecks, as well as heathland birds
- Search for the region's butterflies, including the localised Lulworth Skipper
- Options to listen for Nightjars and Noctule Bats at dusk
- View nesting seabird colonies
- See the south-west's largest breeding colony of Common Terns at Lodmoor
- Look for Manx & Balearic Shearwaters at Portland Bill, plus skuas & auks



Images from top: Silver-studded Blues, Marsh Harrier and the Jurassic Coast



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: [info@naturetrek.co.uk](mailto:info@naturetrek.co.uk)

W: [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk)

## Introduction

On this week long wildlife break we will explore some of Dorset's best nature reserves and enjoy its beautiful rolling countryside from a conveniently positioned base, near Wareham. Dorset's enviable variety of special habitats offers a wealth of natural history, and the summer is an excellent time to enjoy these.

During our stay we will visit Radipole Lake looking for the Marsh Harriers and numerous warblers that breed in its reed beds, including 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. Finally we will visit Portland Bill, scanning for such seabirds as Manx and Balearic Shearwater, skuas and auks, and look for passerines feeding on the headlands.

Another day we will visit Durlston Cliffs to view one of England's most southerly seabird colonies, and look for breeding Peregrines and Ravens. The Purbeck heaths 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. One evening, as dusk approaches, there will be the option to go and listen for the sound of 'churring' Nightjars, whose calls permeate the evening air as Noctule Bats take to the wing.

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. The grasslands at the top of the cliffs also shelter one of the UK's rarer butterflies, the very localised Lulworth Skipper, plus a range of other species such as Silver-studded Blue, Wall, Marbled White and Brown Argus.

Brownsea Island where Red Squirrels can still be found, along with Sika Deer and eleven species of bat, will be another of our destinations. This small island, at 1 ½ miles long and ¾ mile wide, has a range of habitats from lagoons to woodlands, made up of over 100 tree species, both coniferous and deciduous.

We're sure to have a week of wonderful wildlife in this fantastic part of the country!

## 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 Wareham, transfer Corfe Castle

Those participants arriving by train will be collected from Wareham Station around 1400 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 tour will be in a comfortable hotel in Corfe Castle. After checking in, we will head out for the afternoon, mostly likely towards Studland where we'll be introduced to some of the wildlife in the area. This part of the Purbecks consists of a mosaic of coastal heaths, woods, wetlands, dunes and grasslands which provide habitat for a broad range of species, such as Emperor Dragonflies, Emerald Damselflies, Water Vole, Little Egret, Meadow Pipit, Sand Lizard and Heath Tiger Beetle. There are also 4 miles of golden sand beaches, so we may perhaps conclude the afternoon with a leisurely stroll by the water, keeping our eyes open for any Osprey that may be fishing offshore.

### Days 2 – 6

### Excursions around Dorset

During the next week we will visit a number of sites and reserves as we search for the region's wildlife.

Durlston Country Park and its seabird cliffs, are 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. There may also be time, for those who wish, to take a ride on the train from Swanage to Corfe Castle (the cost of this ticket is not included in the tour cost).

A little further north lies the Purbeck heaths where we will 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. We will also explore 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 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 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 one evening there will be the option head out to one of the heaths 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 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.



RSPB's Radipole Lake is 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.



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 any 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.

At the southern tip of Portland Bill 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. 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.

(Please note that the day at Portland and Weymouth will most probably be the longest day out as these sites are located the furthest from our base.)

One day we'll explore 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. This is also a good area in which to watch out for the Lulworth Skipper and other grassland butterflies.

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.



Brownsea Island is a nature reserved owned National Trust, located in Poole Harbour and home to one of the UK's most southerly Red Squirrel populations. In order to reach it we will need to travel by ferry. At just 1.5 by 0.75 miles, this small island packs in a broad range of habitats from lagoons and wet areas through managed heathland to native deciduous and mixed pine woodlands. In the summer the lagoons are used by Common and Sandwich Terns to breed, while gulls, seabirds and waders visit during high tide. We may also be fortunate enough to catch a glimpse of a beautiful Kingfisher. In the drier heathland areas a variety of passerines breed in the heather and gorse. It's also possible to find Common Lizard and Green Tiger Beetle scurrying through the vegetation or basking in a sunny spot.

## Day 7

## Depart

Our final morning will be spent in the area around Corfe Castle and Wareham, in search of any wildlife that we may have missed earlier in the week or just enjoying more of the stunning heathland and coastal habitats. Around mid-afternoon our tour will come to an end and we will go our separate ways. For those travelling by train, there will be a drop off at Wareham station.

---

## Grading

There will be no serious walking involved. 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. For those feeling more energetic there will be the option on one or two of the days to walk a little further.

## Accommodation & Food

We will be staying the lovely Morton's House Hotel in Corfe Castle, near Wareham. The main building is a 16th century Elizabethan Manor House. Bedrooms have a traditional feel and all rooms have en-suite facilities.

All meals are included in the cost of the tour, from dinner/evening meal on Day 1 to lunch on Day 7. Breakfasts and evening meals will be taken in the 2 AA Rosette dining room, where meals are based on local, seasonal produce. Each evening we will have a selection of choices for our two course meal. Lunches will either be packed/picnic lunches or taken in a small café.

## 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 any 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 is highly recommended.

## Clothing and equipment

Binoculars are essential. Bring a telescope if you have one, since it will be useful for any 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. We'd recommend bringing warm weather clothing – light, cool layers that you can use to cover up with – as well as a warm layer for cooler days or evenings. You should also be prepared in case of wet weather. Please also bring a small torch for the evening nightjar walk. A small day pack is useful for carrying items you need for the day.

A water bottle should be brought for during the day and if you enjoy tea or coffee when you're out and about then a thermos flask should be brought with you. Having some cutlery, a cup and a plate/bowl/plastic box would be useful for picnic lunches.

## Arrival/ Departure Details

### By Train

We will be able to collect people from Wareham station around 1400 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 station by 1500hrs.

## By Car

If you come by car, you may drive directly to the hotel in Corfe Castle. Address details will be provided in the final joining instructions sent before the tour. The meeting time will be approximately 1430 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 hotel for you.

## Inclusions / Exclusions

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

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

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

- Drinks
- Any other personal spending e.g. souvenirs
- Activities not included in the tour (eg. train ride from Swanage to Corfe Castle, museum entrance fees, etc.)

## 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](http://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.