

Ireland – Wildlife of Wexford in Spring

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline Itinerary

- Day 1** Meet near Pembroke Dock and ferry to Rosslare
- Day 2/4** Excursions around Wexford
- Day 5** Final excursion and ferry to Pembroke Dock

Departs

May/June/July

Focus

Birds, general natural history and a little History

Grading

A/B – see detail below

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code IRL05)

Highlights

- Explore dramatic headlands and the varied habitats of south-eastern Ireland
- Seabirds including Puffins, Razorbills, Guillemots, Gannets; Chough possible
- Breeding Roseate, Arctic, Sandwich and Common Terns
- Cetaceans may include Common and Bottlenose Dolphins
- Day trip to the seabird colonies of Great Saltee Island; including Puffins
- Based at a lovely Georgian property in the small village of Arthurstown



Roseate Tern, Atlantic Puffins, Wexford Coast



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Introduction

This holiday to the county of Wexford in south-eastern Ireland will provide a varied short break full of wildlife and dramatic scenery. From tern and seabird colonies to dramatic headlands and historical sites – we shall enjoy everything about this little-visited corner of Ireland.

The county of Wexford, located in the far south-eastern corner of Ireland, holds an abundance of wildlife year-round. We shall explore a range of habitats from open lakes and sand dunes to beaches, coastal lagoons and rugged cliffs, encountering a great range of wildlife while also enjoying some historical sites too. We shall be based at the excellent Glendine House, a Georgian property in the small village of Arthurstown on the Hook Peninsula, close to the River Barrow.

Meeting at Pembroke Dock, we will take the 4-hour crossing to Rosslare and, whilst cruising close to Skomer, Skokholm and Grassholm islands, we can expect to see Manx Shearwaters, Gannets, Kittiwakes, Guillemots, Razorbills and Puffins as we travel. Cetaceans may include Common and Bottlenose Dolphins and Harbour Porpoises.

Over the next three full days we will enjoy a range of sites as we explore the area. At Lady's Island Lake, a huge sedimentary lagoon, we can expect great views of Sandwich, Common, Arctic and even Roseate Terns – one of the rarest breeding seabirds in Europe. All are present in good numbers while Mediterranean Gulls, Redshank, Oystercatcher and Shelduck also breed and Little Tern is also possible. A day trip to Great Saltee Island (just a short 20-minute boat trip away) will reveal large seabird colonies including Puffins and a walk-in Gannetry! Chough and Grey Seals can also be seen here.

We shall call in to Tacumshin, one of Ireland's premier birdwatching sites, where we can expect a wide range of wetland species and the ever-present chance of something unexpected. Other sites along the south Wexford coast will include Hook Head, a low-lying headland with a lighthouse in a dramatic setting where we may find more seabirds and cetaceans, and Ballyteige Burrow, a protected dune system, which holds an array of dune flora and insects – including Dark Green Fritillary. We may also have time to visit the 12th-century Tintern Abbey, which is close by.

After a most varied few days, we shall then board the ferry back to Pembroke Dock (scanning for wildlife as we travel), where the tour concludes. Each evening, we shall eat at a local restaurant in the village and lunches are at the group's own expense. We shall often stop off to buy sandwiches and stop during the day for a picnic. We may also call into a café or pub for a lunch stop.

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

Meet in Pembroke Dock & travel to Arthurstown

Today we shall meet at Pembroke Dock in time for our ferry crossing to Rosslare. The ferry currently departs at 14:45 and arrives into Rosslare at 18:45. As we leave Pembroke Dock and head out across the Celtic Sea, we shall pass close to Skomer, Skokholm and Grassholm meaning that during the crossing we should see a range of seabirds. Scanning the water and skies should reveal Manx Shearwaters, Gannets, Kittiwakes, Guillemots, Razorbills, Puffins and Kittiwakes. Cetaceans are also possible, especially in calm weather. Common and Bottlenose Dolphins and Harbour Porpoises are more regular visitors, but occasionally other species such as Minke and Fin Whales are also seen.



Common Dolphin

Once ashore at Rosslare, we will have a chance to see Black Guillemots around the harbour, as these special birds breed here. Then we shall drive for around an hour to Arthurstown and settle into our excellent hotel. Depending on timings we may eat before arriving at the hotel. Our accommodation for the tour is Glendine House, a Georgian property close to the River Barrow.

Day 2

Lady's Island Lake

After a lovely breakfast, we will head out exploring and dedicate the majority of today to visiting Lady's Island Lake. After an hour's drive, we will arrive at this large, shallow freshwater lake, just inland from the sea. The small, low-lying islands create an excellent resting and breeding site for a number of special species, such as Sandwich, Common, Arctic and even Roseate Terns – all of which are present in good numbers here. The Roseate Tern is one of the rarest seabirds in Europe and visiting this site gives us a very privileged opportunity to see them at a breeding colony. Black-headed and Mediterranean Gulls also breed, plus Redshank, Oystercatcher and Shelduck. Additionally, there is also a good range of other wetland species to be seen along with Reed and Sedge Warblers and Reed Buntings.

Towards the southern end of the lake, we will witness the amazing large dune barrier and the outward view to the Saltee Islands. This is a good place for us to again view Roseate Terns and hopefully also Little Terns. Gannets and Manx Shearwaters may also be seen offshore and if we look inland, we can hope to see a range of waders, from Ringed Plovers to Sanderlings and Turnstones. The surrounding grassland habitat offers excellent habitat for Stonechat, Wheatear, Linnet and possibly Grasshopper Warbler. This is a wonderful spot for any entomologists and botanists as well.

This whole area has a lovely wild feel to it and it's possible to walk east along the beach and through the dunes and scrub for three kilometres or so to Carnsore Point – the south-easternmost point of Ireland. The local village here is an important Roman Catholic pilgrimage site with an easy trail along the shore, which gives good views out over the lake and the islands. Lunch will be a wild picnic, somewhere along the way.

After a lovely day at the lake, we will make the drive back to Arthurstown and again dine at a local restaurant.

Day 3

Great Saltee

Today, we will take a day trip to Great Saltee with the boat departing from Kilmore Quay (weather permitting). The crossing takes about 20 minutes, and we will then enjoy several hours ashore. Saltee is a beautiful little island with large seabird colonies including Puffins and a walk-in Gannetry.

There are also breeding Peregrine Falcon, Chough and Raven here – with the chance of scarce or rare migrants. It's also an important site for Grey Seals, as well as an interesting array of plants. After a fascinating time exploring the island, taking our time to enjoy as much as possible, we will then head back to land. Any extra time at the end of the afternoon will then be spent at Tacumshin, which is another large shallow lake between Lady's Island and Kilmore Quay and is one of Ireland's premier birding sites with an outstanding track record for big lists and the rare and unusual. We can expect a wide range of wetland species and the chance of something unexpected. It's a great site for Marsh Harrier, Reed Warbler and even Bearded Tit, all very localised species in Ireland. Again, lunch will be taken as a wild picnic and once again, we will drive back to Arthurstown and dine in a local restaurant.



Northern Gannets

Day 4

Hook Head, Bannow Bay, Ballyteige Burrow & the Cull

Today, we will have a full day exploring some of the other key sites along the southern end of the Wexford coast. We will make the short drive to Hook Head, which is a low-lying headland with a lighthouse. It's a dramatic setting and we have the chance here of Choughs, seabirds and hopefully cetaceans. Next, we will head to Bannow Bay, a large intertidal inlet with extensive mudflats which may hold waders and wildfowl.

Another key site on our visit is the protected dune system of Ballyteige Burrow. This threatened habitat runs for many miles along the coast between Kilmore Quay and the Hook Peninsula. Here there is a chance to view some unique dune flora and the array of insects that call this ever-changing environment home. A range of insects can be found including Dark Green Fritillary (scarce and local

in Ireland), which will be flying in June. Finally, we shall visit the Cull, which is a narrow intertidal inlet enclosed by Ballyteige Burrow. There is a chance here for more waders and gulls, while Kingfisher can be found. Depending on sightings and the weather, we may not visit every site listed above, but we will be sure to have a most varied day exploring this wild and scenic region.



Dark Green Fritillary

At some point during the tour, we will also have a chance to visit some of the prominent historical sites in the local area. Locations such as Tintern Abbey will give us a glimpse into the rich cultural history of this intriguing Irish county.

After a thorough day of exploring, we will make the last stop back to our hotel before our final dinner together in Arthurstown.

Day 5

Return Ferry to Pembroke Dock

With an early start for the breakfast-time ferry out of Rosslare, we will make our way back to the UK. We can once again scan the seas for wildlife and have a final chance to find cetaceans and seabirds as we journey through the Celtic Sea.

After we have arrived back in Pembroke Dock, we will all say our goodbyes and make our journeys home.

Tour Grading & Focus

During the day, we will be undertaking short walks at a relatively slow pace in beautiful places to observe the flora and fauna of the region. The walks will largely be on well-trodden paths and there are no long treks involved. However, you should be prepared for some undulating terrain and covering a maximum of around 5km across a whole day. The tour is suitable for all ages. All walks are at a slow naturalist's pace, with plenty of stopping and starting.

One of the main objectives will be to provide participants with observations of the above-mentioned species and habitats and all aspects of natural history will be observed and recorded during the tour. There will be some excellent photographic opportunities too.

Weather, Clothing & Equipment

The weather can be very pleasant at this time of year and this region is actually the area that receives the most sun in Ireland. That being said, wind, rain and cooler temperatures are possible at any time of year and we shall visit some exposed points. Please bring warm, waterproof clothing and stout footwear. You'll probably need woolly hats as well as sun hats and sun cream to cover all possibilities and checking the forecast before departing is advised. Binoculars are required to ensure

you can appreciate the more distant wildlife and if you have a telescope, it would be worth bringing it along too.

What's Included

Everything is included in the cost of the holiday, except for lunches and any alcoholic drinks. We will stop to pick up sandwiches and lunch items or call into a café or pub and this will be kept flexible.

Travel Arrangements & Joining the Tour

The group will meet your leader at a car park outside the Pembroke Dock Main Terminal Building. This parking area allows free long-stay parking for up to 2 weeks. The group will meet there and board the van to cross to Ireland.

Pembroke Dock, on the Southwestern tip of Wales is situated close to the M4 making it the ideal port if you are travelling to or from London, the South of England or the Channel Ports.

The GPS co-ordinates for Pembroke are: N51 41 42/ W4 57 10

Post Code is: SA72 6UF

Travelling by Public Transport

Pembroke Dock is the closest national railway station. By train, it is an approximately 2-hour direct journey from Swansea Railway Station or a 3-hour direct journey from Cardiff Central. If travelling by public transport, please let us know so we can look at a convenient place to meet you.

There is a railway station in Pembroke Dock, but the frequency of the trains is very limited. Relevant link: www.railtrack.co.uk

Extending Your Holiday

Whilst there are no set extensions for this tour, some clients enjoy continuing on to other parts of Ireland, and we can always adjust your ferry home if you wish.

Transport

We will travel in a 9-seater minibus.

Accommodation

We shall be based at the excellent Glendine House, a Georgian property in the small village of Arthurstown on the Hook Peninsula, close to the River Barrow.



The Glendine House

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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