Sardinia – Jewel of the Mediterranean

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly Olbia, drive Dorgali
Day 2 – 4	Natural history excursions from Dorgali in search of plants, birds and butterflies
Day 5 – 7	Natural history excursions from Capoterra in search of plants, birds and butterflies
Day 8	Fly London

Departs
April

Focus
General Natural History

Grading
Day walks only.

Dates & Prices
See website (tour code ITA05)

Highlights
- Salt pans filled with Flamingoes, waders & Slender-billed Gulls
- 25 Orchid species amongst a profusion of wild flowers, including endemics
- Mountainsides covered in maquis & Cork Oak woodland
- Eleonora's Falcon, Barbary Partridge & Audouin's Gull
- Visit ancient Nuraghi villages







From Top: Sawfly Orchid, Sardinian Warbler, Two-tailed Pasha

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Introduction

This is an 8-day holiday to Sardinia in search of the birds, plants and butterflies of the island's coastal lagoons and mountainous interior. It is a two-centre holiday, based in simple but comfortable hotels, each ideally situated for exploration of the island's best wildlife sites. Our first four nights will be spent at a delightful family-run hotel near Dorgali, on the east coast. This will be our base from which to explore the Sopramonte region of the Gennargentu Mountains, where shepherds still roam with their large flocks of goats and sheep. This is a rugged and beautiful area of maquis-covered limestone mountains that descend to an unspoilt coastline of remote sandy coves and isolated cave systems.

We then transfer south to Capoterra, where we spend the final three nights of the tour in a lovely hotel close to some flamingo-laden wetlands.

Each day we will enjoy the island's natural history by driving to interesting areas and spending as much time as possible on foot, walking and ambling gently through the day as we search for wayside plants, birds and butterflies under the guidance of our expert leaders. We will also hope to find time to enjoy archaeological sites and other pre-historic Nuraghic dwellings dating from around 2,000 BC.

Please note that we may reverse the itinerary below and visit Capoterra first, before proceeding to Dorgali in the latter half of the week. Our decision will be based on the flight times from London which are confirmed nearer the time.


Sardinia

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 Fly Cagliari/Olbia, Transfer to Dorgali

We begin our holiday with a flight from London to Olbia in northern Sardinia. Depending on flight schedules the tour may instead fly into Cagliari in the south, and the itinerary will be taken in reverse.

We will set off south, headed for Dorgali, our base for the next four nights. Along the roadside we may see Strawberry tree (*Arbutus unedo*), Tree Heath (*Erica arborea*), Wild Olive, Evergreen Oak (*Quercus ilex*), Myrtle (*Myrtus communis*) and Lentisk (*Pistacio lentiscus*).

After a leg-stretch en route for some gentle botanizing and possible European Bee-eater and Woodlark, we will arrive at our hotel in good time before an evening drink and dinner.

Overnight: Dorgali

Days 2 – 4 Dorgali

During our 4-night stay at Dorgali we will take leisurely day trips from our hotel in order to enjoy the fine habitats of the area and their many birds, plants and butterflies, planning our activities according to the prevailing weather conditions.


Corsican Heath


Pink Butterfly Orchid

On one day we shall travel south and west from the hotel into the Gennargentu Mountains, near the town of Fonni, where we will look for Barbary Partidge, Red backed Shrike, Rock Thrush, Ortolan Bunting and Bee-eater. *Orchis longicornu* is at its best in Sardinia, where we will find it in a wide range of colour forms, and *Orchis papilionaceae* var. *grandiflora* is also widespread on the island, together with its hybrid *Orchis x bornemannii*. We shall be looking, too, for the many *Ophrys* species, amongst them *O. tenthredinifera* and *O. speculum*. In woodlands *Cephalanthera longifolia* and *Epipactus helleborine* occur, whilst growing beneath the pines we may find *Limodorum arbortivum*. On the slopes below the summit of Monte Brunca Spina, depending on the timing of the season, we may find sheets of the pale lilac endemic *Crocus minimus*. In addition the high level flora includes plants like *Paeonia mascula ssp russii*, *Genista morisii*, Alpine Pansy, *Saxifraga corsica and Saxifraga cervicornis*.

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Mirror Orchid

On another morning we will travel to the pretty harbour of Cala Gognone we take a boat to the exquisite cove of Cala Luna. En route we visit one of the caves where the endangered Monk Seal once bred. On reaching Cala Luna we will be able to swim from the white sandy beach in the beautiful turquoise waters then, after a picnic lunch, we shall explore the area near to the beach. An exploration of the gorge inland may also be worthwhile. In the past we have seen Griffon Vulture and Honey Buzzard here, and there is the possibility of an early Eleanora's Falcon, while the area is also good for butterflies, including Corsican Heath and Corsican Swallowtail. The floor of the gorge is a mass of Oleander, Phoenician Juniper, Manna Ash and Elder, with smaller plants such as Swallow-wort and the endemic *Scrophularia trifoliata*. We may also find St Bernard's Lily, Fringed Rue, Scorpion Vetch and the large bulbs of the autumn flowering Sea Squill. On the beach we should find Sea Medick and *Hypercoum procumbens.* We return by boat to Cala Golone and, before returning to Dorgali, we may visit the dramatic clifftop site of Nuraghi Mannu.

Our other full day in the area will start with a visit to the Nuraghic site at Serra Orrios, just north of Dorgali. This will give us a flavour of how life was lived here in approximately 1,000BC. Next we head for Grotto Ispinioli where we explore the gravely garrigue for flowers. Masses of Mirror Orchids grow here, along with the strange parasitic plant *Cytinus hypocistus,* also known as Rose of Cystus. Then we wend our way along a mountain road to the beach at Cala Osalla, stopping to look for Little Owls, Woodchat Shrikes and a Cirl Bunting. We take a picnic lunch on the beach and then explore the dunes for diminutive *Hypecoum procumbens*, a relative of the poppies, *Cakile maritima, Mathiola sinuata*, Large Yellow Restharrow (*Ononis natrix*), with its red veined flowers, Sea medick and Sea Holly. We then head over the mountain to Cala Gonone, from where we walk northwards on a track overlooking the sea enjoying views along the coast. Peregrine Falcons have been seen here by previous Naturetrek groups, together with the usual Sardinian Warblers, Greenfinches and Goldfinches. In places along the track grow masses of *Tassle Hyacinth*, a few spikes of Branched Broomrape, *(Orobanche ramosa*), Small Bugloss (*Echium parviflorum*) and Tree Euphorbia, Mastic Tree and Juniper. On the rocky track side we can also find the pungent shrubs *Stachys glutinosa* and *Teucrium marum*. We return via Cala Gonone to try one of the many ice creams on offer at our favourite gelateria!

Overnights: Dorgali

Day 5 Capoterra

Today we transfer south to our base in Capoterra. We initially head south-west towards Oristano, diverting off west to the coast of the Sinis Peninsular. At Stagno Sale Porcus, just before the seaside town of Pitzu Idu, we will look for wading birds including Greater Flamingos, Black-winged Stilts, Avocets and Curlew Sandpipers. Around the cereal fields Marsh Harriers sometimes quarter, while many Corn Buntings sing from their perches. A lagoon and neighbouring café nearby affords us the necessary facilities and can yeild Slender-billed Gulls, Shelducks, more Flamingos and access to a lovely beach! The profusion of wildflowers behind the cafe holds many insects. We move on to find a picnic spot at the back of a quiet beach. The narrow road down to the beach is often bordered with dramatic stands of the handsome thistles *Silybum marianum* and *Notabasis syriaca*.


Greater Flamingos


Marsh Harrier

Next we make our way back to the main highway at Oristano, with the roadsides a stunning display of red and yellow – poppies of various shades of red, with pink and purple Opium Poppies too, alongside drifts of Crown Daisies. Driving south now, we aim to make good time to our hotel just to the south west of Cagliari. The hotel is surrounded by exotic palm trees and other shrubs including the fragrant blooms of *Acacia dealbata* and colourful drapes of Bougainvillea. You can take the opportunity to enjoy a swim in the hotel's lovely pool before we meet for log and then a welcome meal.

Overnight: Capoterra

Days 6 – 7 Santa Gilla Lagoons & Margani and Monte Arcosu Nature Reserve

Our two full days in the south of the island will be spent looking at contrasting habitats.

On one day we will start with a look at the lagoon complex at Santa Gilla where we should get close views of the elegant Slender-billed Gulls plus Flamingos, egrets and other waders. Then we head north and across the Cixerri valley, taking opportunistic stops for birds and flowers. Our destination is the wooded valleys of Margani, north of Domisnovas. Here we should find orchid rich woodland and banks and add some new species to our list, including the endemics, *Orchis ichnusae* and *Ophrys chestermanii*, plus possible *Limodorum arbortivum* and *Ophrys normanii*. We will picnic in the woods and walk the woodland tracks.

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On our other day we will visit Monte Arcosu, almost certainly accompanied by the warden Giovanni Paulis. Covering 3,000 hectares, Monte Arcosu is the WWF's largest Italian nature reserve and a fine example of the magnificent forest that once clothed the island prior to the logging and then fires that destroyed so much of it in the earlier part of this century. The 3,000-foot granite peak of Monte Arcosu towers above the reserve, whose cliffs, crags and outcrops support a maquis flora of Narrow-leaved Cistus (*Cistus monspeliensis*), *Phyllierea latifolia*, Lentisk (*Pistacia lentiscus*), Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*), broom, juniper, Oleander (*Nerium oleander*) and Strawberry Tree (*Arbutus unedo*). Here we shall also look for *Cyclamen repandum*; two beautiful honeysuckles, *Lonicera etrusca* and *L. implexa*, and a sticky aromatic endemic shrub, *Stachys glutinosa*. In the forests are Holm, Pubescent and Cork Oaks, Yew and tree heath, whilst Olive and Carob Trees stand in the dry glades and pastures. We should find the Scilla-like endemic *Brimeura fastigiata*, *Cymbalaria sardoa* and perhaps the tiny *Bellium bellidioides*. We are also sure to enjoy more orchids today. Two superb tongue orchids, Serapias lingua and S. parviflora are fairly easily found here.


Copper Demoiselle


Violet Birds-nest Orchid

Hunting, of course, is a popular pastime on Sardinia, but nonetheless we may be lucky enough to see some mammals. The endangered Sardinian Deer (an endemic sub-species of the Red Deer and symbol of the reserve), Fallow Deer and Wild Boar all occur here, as well as a variety of such woodland and maquis birds as Coal Tit, Citril Finch, and Subalpine, Dartford, and Sardinian Warblers. Overhead soar birds of prey – amongst them Buzzards, Golden and Bonelli's Eagles, Peregrines, Kestrels and Sparrowhawks. There will also be a chance to look in at the Visitor Centre of the reserve for an appreciation of the conservation work carried out here.

Before returning to our hotel there may be time for a walk among the salt pans near Cagliari, hoping to find Spectacled Warbler, close views of the Flamingos and other waders.

Overnights: Capoterra

Day 8 Fly London

Depending on flight schedules, we will travel to Olbia or Cagliari airport and onwards to the UK.

Tour Grading

Most of our walks will be between two and six kilometres in length, at altitudes of between sea level and 3,000 feet, and at a slow pace so that we can enjoy the birds and plants. Generally we shall take breakfast at 8 a.m. and aim to leave between 8.30 and 9 a.m. for each day's excursion. We will break each day with a lengthy picnic lunch, and will be back around 5 or 6 p.m. for tea or an evening drink. Breakfasts and dinners will be taken in our hotel. On some days there will be optional early morning bird walks before breakfast. All walks and excursions are optional to allow you to take a day or a morning off should you wish, and because we sometimes have two vehicles and usually have two leaders (an ornithologist and a botanist) there will be scope for some flexibility of programme.

Weather

The end of April and early May is prime time for migrant birds and many of the spring flowers; it is also an ideal time to visit as daytime temperatures are usually no more than 80ºF, with mild evenings. We can expect plenty of sunshine, but spring weather can mean afternoon cloud and occasional rain.

Food & accommodation

All food and accommodation is included in the price of this holiday.

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 or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.


Gennargentu Mountains

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