

Sardinia's Dragonflies

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly Alghero/Olbia Costa Smeralda Lago Platamona and Stintino
Day 2	Boat trip to Isola dell' Asinara
Day 3	Lago Baratz and Capo Caccia
Day 4	Gennargentu National Park
Day 5	Lago Coghinas
Day 6	Lago Omodeo and Santa Guista
Day 7	Boat trip to Isola San di Pietro
Day 8	Fly London

Departs

June

Focus

Dragonflies and other wildlife including insects and birds.

Grading

Day walks only. Grade A/B. We will be visiting mostly wetland areas where the gradient will be flat and trainers will be suitable footwear. No long walks.

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code ITA11) or brochure

Highlights

- Copper Demoiselle mating displays and Banded Groundlings around our feet
- Violet Dropwing, Orange-winged Dropwing, Green Hooktail, Bladetail, Lesser Emperor & many others
- Bee-eater, Golden Oriole & Eleonora's Falcon



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Introduction

Sardinia is the second largest island in the Mediterranean and lies in the Tyrrhenian Sea, south of Corsica. It is a land of contrasts, ranging from beautiful white sandy beaches and coves to a rugged mountainous interior. Great care has been taken to ensure that Sardinia has escaped the ravages of tourism which many other Mediterranean islands have suffered. The natural scenery is extremely varied, providing a wide range of habitats for the plants, animals and birds that live here. For the naturalist it is the island's abundant coastal lagoons, extensive forests, mountains and rugged limestone hills that are of particular interest, as they are home to a wide variety of flora and fauna. Human settlements have existed here for thousands of years and Sardinia is studded with traces of ancient civilisations, such as the curious stone tower monuments called nuraghi, built by Bronze Age inhabitants.

This tour visits the island's wild and little-visited western coast and, if you love dragonflies, this is the trip for you! There are some amazingly colourful dragonflies here – indeed you would need to travel to Africa to see some of these species elsewhere. At this time of year 35 species can be seen, most of which are not found in Britain, including Green Hooktail, Bladetail, Banded Groundling, Island Bluetail and Long Skimmer. The island also boasts a rich diversity of other wildlife and is home to many endemic species; we will explore its marshes, lakes and other wetland areas in search of a tapestry of southern European insects, amphibians, reptiles and birds. Above us, the majestic outlines of Griffon Vultures will rise into the deep summer-blue sky, while closer to the ground we will be hoping to encounter some of the island's smaller inhabitants, such as the Tyrrhenian Painted Frog and Tyrrhenian Tree Frog, and two species of lizard: the Pygmy Algyroides and Tyrrhenian Wall Lizard. Red and Fallow Deer and Wild Boar abound in the scrub and forests. In summer the aromatic maquis delivers scents of thyme, myrtle, rosemary and lavender which blow across the island and flamingoes, known to the locals as 'rose-coloured folk', strut about in the numerous lagoons. Turquoise sea and lovely beaches also help provide a marvellous backdrop to our main quest – dragonflies!

After a flight to Alghero or Olbia Costa Smeralda (depending on flight schedules), we will transfer to a nearby hotel in the north-west of the island for the first part of our stay. The Sardinian coastline offers secluded inlets, golden sand dunes, wild lilies and cistus as well as rugged cliffs that plummet to the sea, and from our base here we will visit nearby lakes and marshes that are excellent for birding and dragonfly-watching. Hundreds of Banded Groundling will be flying around our feet as we walk along, making the ground appear to shimmer underfoot. Island Bluetails, Lesser Emperors and Long Skimmers will be among the special dragonflies to look out for in these wetlands, darting around the long pink legs of Black-winged Stilts which pick their way daintily through the shallows here.

We will drive to the small reserve of Isola dell'Asinara, home to a large population of the rare Dark Spreadwing. Other dragonflies we'll hope to see on our guided tour of this uninhabited island are: Small Spreadwing, Migrant Spreadwing, Broad Scarlet, Dainty Bluet, Blue-eyed Hawker, Southern Darter, Small Redeye and the distinctive Red-veined Darter. We will keep a look-out for the island's white donkeys, wild horses, Wild Boars and Mouflons, too. Lago Baratz is the only natural freshwater lake on Sardinia and offers one of the best places on the island for dragonfly-watching: 15 species can be seen among the reeds and scrub! At the nearby area of Bosa, situated between the west-coast towns of Oristano and Alghero, the small streams are awash with Copper Demoiselles, and we'll be watching for their fluttery, butterfly-like

flight – the males of this stunning damselfly perform dazzling display flights to attract females into their territories! Small Red Damselfly, Western Spectre, Green-eyed Hawker, and the glorious Violet Dropwing are found near these streams. We'll hope to round off our time here with views of Griffon Vultures and the romantic sunsets the area is famous for.

For the final part of our holiday we will journey to the south-western extremity of Sardinia. Purple Gallinule, Little Bittern and Red-crested Pochard are among the rare breeding birds we may see in this part of the island and we will visit the Isola di San Pietro, off the south-west corner of Sardinia, to see its colony of Eleonora's Falcons which breeds there every summer. We can hope to add more than 10 species of dragonflies during our leisurely walks in the surrounding countryside, and top of our list of hoped for finds will be the Orange-winged Dropwing – a new species for Europe, coming from Africa and only recently discovered in the Cagliari area!

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 Alghero or Olbia Costa Smeralda

Today we begin our holiday with a flight to Alghero or Olbia Costa Smeralda, depending on flight schedules.

We next take a short drive to Lago Platamona to get the tour off to an exciting start. The protected wetland area enables us to get an overview from bird hides and see a variety of very colourful and exotic dragonflies that can only be seen by travelling far south in Europe or by visiting North Africa. The very photogenic Violet Dropwing perches close to the wooden jetties that reach out into the lake beyond the reed beds whereas the Long Skimmer will provide a greater challenge for photographers. With some luck, the endemic Island Bluetail can be seen here.

Late afternoon we will drive a short distance to the other side of the Lago Platamona to see dragonflies flying in the low light, including the fascinating Northern Banded Groundling which flies around our feet as we cross bare ground. Meanwhile wetland birds will be coming in to roost in the reed beds

Finally we'll drive back to our hotel for a drink, dinner and a run through of the day's sightings.

Day 2

Alghero

Today we take a boat trip out to an island which used to hold a top security prison for Mafioso, Isola dell'Asinara. We will be taken off the beaten track by Sara, a local guide who will show us places other visitors do not get to see but where the wildlife is abundant. We are hoping to find the rare and European-wide threatened species, the Dark Spreadwing, which only has a short emergence time coinciding with our tour. We should also see the Dainty Bluet, Small Red, Red-veined Darter and Scarlet Darter. Wild Mouflon are elusive here but the local white donkeys are more approachable. We expect to find two local specialties

here, the Barbary Partridge and Tyrrhenian Wall Lizard while, from the 450m summit of the island, we will see all the way across to Corsica if the weather is clear.

Day 3

Alghero

For our last day in the north of Sardinia we will visit one wetland area to look for a variety of wildlife and a wild coastline in search of vultures.

Lago Baratz is a beautiful clear lake set in a granite bowl surrounded by reed beds, tamarisk, Mediterranean scrub and pine woodland. Water is scarce on Sardinia and this is its only natural lake. A short walk from the vehicles will take us to open scrub where we hope to see a variety of butterflies (Two tailed Pasha has been seen here), other interesting insects and reptiles (one year we found a baby Hermann's Tortoise). Some years the lake nearly dries out and is a mecca for dragonflies such as Dainty Bluet, Blue Chaser, Blue eyed Hawker and Keeled Skimmer *anceps* subspecies, at other times it can be quite full and more interesting for its other wildlife. The rather cute looking endemic Tyrrhenian Tree Frog lives here among the rushes and terrapins sunbathe on rocks off shore. Bee-eaters, Cirl Bunting, Woodlark and Marsh Harriers are always worth watching.

Once we have enjoyed lunch under woodland shade we move off to a wild coastline with dramatic offshore islands. We spend time watching seabirds, Alpine Swifts and Crag Martins wheeling around the steep cliffs of Capo Caccia before driving along the coastline in search of Griffon Vultures and other raptors.

We return to Alghero for a final night.

Day 4

Abbasanta

We will get up early today for a drive east to the Gennargentu National Park. We will only have time to explore a small part of this wild landscape overlooked by dramatically steep limestone mountains, but what we hope to see will make it very worthwhile. At the foot of these mountains is a series of springs where dragonflies congregate and fly over crystal clear streams. The most photogenic is the metallic red Copper Demoiselle but there are other species we will also see.

We will have lunch near a café at the visitor centre and see if we can pick up any local knowledge regarding recent wildlife sightings. Many parts of Sardinia are unexplored with regard to dragonflies and we have an opportunity to, if the group is interested, to explore some new sites of interest.

On the way back we will stop at Lago Omodeo. How much time we spend here depends on the water levels and how successful we have been so far in tracking down the elusive Bladetail and Banded Groundling.

We stay the night in Abbasanta.

Day 5

Abbasanta

Today we drive west and go in search of two rarities: the Green Hooktail and the very strange looking Bladetail. We begin our search along the shoreline of Lago Coghinas, an enormous lake created many years ago for water storage but now looking very much part of the landscape. And of course who knows what else we will come across in the meadows and shorelines of this lakeland area. Stone Curlew, Hoopoe, Bee-eater and Red-backed Shrike are among the birds we can expect to find, together with a fine selection of butterflies.

After lunch we will visit another small marshy wetland that has proven to be a real dragonfly highlight in the past. Bladetail and Yellow-veined Skimmer are among the toppers we will look for.

There is the possibility at any stage of the trip, if the groups wishes to, of visiting some of the indigenous cultural sites of the Nuraghi people who built 8,000 tall towers all around the island in Bronze Age times, and still an enigma to archaeologists.

An optional after dinner walk in the grounds of the hotel could turn up the resident Scops Owl, Nightjar as well as a nice selection of nocturnal insects!

Day 6

Igelsias/Carbonia

We plan to spend the morning at the lakes near Oristano. Here the salt pans are often full of birds. Several species of Gull and Tern patrol the area closely watched by a good selection of Herons, Egrets and waders.

In the afternoon we plan to go Cagliari marshes. Here we will take our lunch in the shade of a large Egret Colony and scan Lake Molentargus for any ducks, flamingos and other wetland birds, as well as checking out the insect life of this important wildlife site.

We will then continue towards our hotel checking out some more lakes and ponds on the way.

The spacious and delightful grounds of our hotel attract many migrant birds and after dinner we will offer a short night walk to look for Nightjars, bats and many moths that fly around.



Greater Flamingoes

Day 7

Igelsias/Carbonia

We rise early and drive to the attractive town of Portoscuso to catch a ferry across to the wild Isola di San Pietro. We will hopefully see flamingos, Audouin's Gull, Avocet and Black Winged Stilt on the salt pans soon after we have landed. But today is as much about the dramatic coastline as the wildlife that lives here. There are amazing views across the bay to P. Grossa and Golfo della Mezzaluna from the cliff tops. The open maquis countryside has Blue Rock Thrush and Spotted Flycatcher and we will be looking out for

Alpine Swift and Elenora's and Peregrine Falcons along the cliffs. Lunch will be in the shade of the old lighthouse of this wild island. After our return by boat we will finish off our exciting exploration of Sardinia with a typical Sardinian meal.

Day 8

Fly London

After breakfast we will drive to the airport for our flight back to the UK, bidding farewell to the Mediterranean jewel of Sardinia.

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 two leaders there may be scope for some flexibility in the programme.

Weather

Hot and dry with possible heavy thunderstorms at this time of year. High factor sun cream, hat and light loose clothing strongly advised. Bottled water provided during the day.

Food & accommodation

All food and accommodation is included in the price of this holiday. Comfortable hotels in Sassari, Abbasanta and Pula with en suite facilities.

Sardinia is famous for its local food.

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.