

Go Slow on Sicily – Autumn

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline Itinerary

Day 1 Fly Catania; transfer Siracusa

Days 2 – 6 Daily excursions in search of birds and other wildlife

Day 7 Fly London

Departs

September

Focus

Birds, Botany, Entomology, and other wildlife

Grading

A. Day walks only, all straightforward (and optional)

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code ITA25) or brochure

Highlights

- Explore south-facing headlands for recently arrived migrants
- Visits to famous archaeological sites in the ancient city of Siracusa
- Moth-trapping
- Led by an expert naturalist



Eastern Subalpine Warbler



Convolvulus Hawkmoth



Autumn Mandrake



Naturetrek

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Introduction

Sicily in autumn offers a wonderful blend of wildlife, landscapes and culture, and this relaxed-paced tour is designed to showcase the very best of the island's south-eastern corner. Based near the historic city of Siracusa, we will spend a week exploring a rich variety of wetlands, coastal headlands, limestone gorges and traditional farmland, all of which provide vital habitat for both resident wildlife and the thousands of birds migrating across the Mediterranean. With an expert naturalist guide leading the way, we will enjoy the spectacle of autumn migration while also taking time to appreciate Sicily's plants, butterflies, dragonflies, reptiles and other fascinating wildlife.

The tour combines rewarding wildlife-watching with opportunities to experience Sicily's remarkable history, scenery and cuisine. Visits to renowned sites such as Vendicari, Pantani Cuba e Longarini and the dramatic Cavagrande del Cassibile Natural Reserve are complemented by time to explore the beautiful baroque town of Noto and the ancient streets of Ortigia. Comfortable accommodation, excellent local food and a relaxed itinerary ensure a truly enjoyable week, while evening moth-trapping sessions add an extra dimension to our exploration of the island's rich natural heritage.



Itinerary

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and 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 Catania

Today we begin our tour with a flight from London to Catania, midway along Sicily's east coast. With luck, clear skies will afford spectacular views of Mount Etna and its often-smoking summit during our descent. After completing the arrival formalities, we will collect our minibus and head south to Siracusa, where we will settle into our accommodation for the week, the charming Agriturismo Pozzo di Mazza. Situated just 7 kilometres from Siracusa, and close to the Plemmirio Marine Protected Area, our base is ideally located for exploring the wildlife-rich coastline around Arenella and Fontane Bianche.

Depending on our flight schedule, there may be time for a gentle walk around the grounds of our accommodation in search of our first migrants. At this season, the gardens can hold a variety of species, with Serins singing from the treetops, Woodchat Shrikes scanning for prey and Sardinian Warblers skulking through the vegetation. Later, we will gather for our first dinner together, providing an opportunity to get to know our fellow travellers while enjoying a delicious selection of locally inspired Sicilian dishes.

Day 2

Pantani Cuba e Longarini

Today we head to the far south of the island to explore the extensive private reserve of Pantani Cuba e Longarini. Enjoying exclusive access to its lakes and scrapes, we will visit one of south-eastern Sicily's finest sites for both breeding wetland birds and autumn migrants. Breeding Collared Pratincoles, Kentish Plovers and Black-winged Stilts may be joined by passage Curlew Sandpipers and Temminck's Stints, while Gull-billed and Whiskered Terns are often seen gracefully hawking insects over the water.

The reserve's extensive scrub provides ideal habitat for migrating flycatchers, warblers and shrikes. Such concentrations of birds inevitably attract an impressive array of raptors. As well as the resident Marsh Harrier, we may encounter Montagu's Harrier, Red-footed Falcon and, with a little luck, the elegant Lesser Kestrel.



Marsh Sandpiper

We will also spend time searching for the elusive Western Swamphen, which breeds within the reserve, while impressive flocks of Greater Flamingoes and Slender-billed Gulls are often a feature of the wetlands.

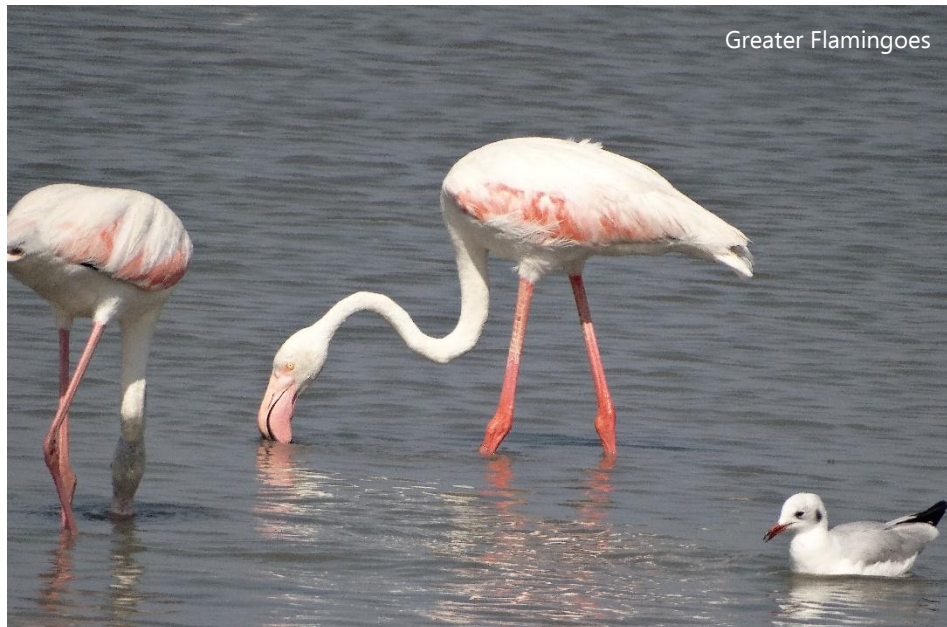
All too soon, it will be time to return to Siracusa. There will be an opportunity to relax at the hotel or explore the surrounding gardens before another excellent evening meal. If conditions are favourable, we will once again run the moth-trap, in anticipation of discovering a fascinating selection of Sicily's nocturnal wildlife the following morning.

Day 3

Vendicari, time to explore Ortigia

After checking the moth-trap, or perhaps enjoying a pre-breakfast bird walk around the hotel grounds, we will set off for the renowned Vendicari Nature Reserve. This extensive coastal wetland is one of Sicily's most important migration stopovers and offers excellent wildlife-watching. From a series of strategically placed hides, we will scan the lagoons for feeding terns, while Marsh Harriers and Purple Herons patrol the reedbeds and migrant warblers forage amongst the coastal juniper scrub.

When conditions are favourable, exposed mudflats can attract an impressive variety of waders. Smaller species may include Curlew



Sandpiper, Little Stint, Green Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper and Common Sandpiper, while deeper waters often hold Black-winged Stilts, Eurasian Spoonbills and Greater Flamingoes. Adding a historical dimension to our visit is the striking 15th-century coastal watchtower built during the reign of Peter of Aragon, which overlooks the reserve and serves as a reminder of Sicily's rich past.

We will enjoy a picnic lunch before returning to Siracusa for a leisurely afternoon exploring the enchanting island of Ortigia, the historic heart of the city. With its elegant piazzas, beautiful Baroque architecture and bustling cafés, Ortigia is a delight to discover at your own pace. You may choose to visit the cathedral, wander the atmospheric backstreets, browse the local shops or simply relax with a coffee while soaking up the ambience of this captivating island.

Later, the group will reunite and return to the hotel with time to relax before dinner. Weather permitting, we will once again run the moth-trap and look forward to discovering what nocturnal visitors have been attracted overnight.

Day 4

Cavagrande del Cassibile, Noto

If the moth-trap has been run, we will begin the day by examining the previous night's catch, admiring the remarkable variety of shapes, colours and intricate patterns displayed by Sicily's nocturnal insects.

After breakfast, we will head south before turning inland towards the Riserva Naturale Cavagrande del Cassibile. Following a scenic drive through the hills, we will reach a spectacular viewpoint overlooking one of Sicily's most impressive limestone gorges, carved deep into the landscape by the Cassibile River far below. From this lofty vantage point, we will search the cliffs for Rock Sparrow and Blue Rock Thrush, while keeping watch for raptors using the gorge as a natural migration corridor. Peregrine and Lanner Falcon are both possible here. Following a coffee stop at the rifugio, we will enjoy a leisurely walk along the gorge rim, where olive and almond groves provide habitat for Cirl Bunting and a variety of autumn migrants. Overhead, Woodlarks may be heard delivering their distinctive fluting song.

After a picnic lunch, we will continue to the beautiful Baroque town of Noto, one of Sicily's architectural treasures and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Built from warm honey-coloured limestone, the town glows in the afternoon light and provides a wonderful setting for a stroll through its elegant streets and piazzas. There will be time to admire the magnificent cathedral and grand palazzi, browse the independent shops or simply relax with a traditional Sicilian coffee or gelato while soaking up the atmosphere. Above the rooftops, House Martins and Swifts wheel through the skies, taking advantage of the countless nesting opportunities provided by the historic buildings.

Later, we will return to our hotel with time to relax or explore the gardens before another excellent evening meal. If conditions are favourable, we will once again run the moth-trap in anticipation of another fascinating morning's discoveries.

Day 5 Penisola Magnisi, Saline di Priolo & Siracusa Archaeological Park

After checking the moth-trap, or perhaps enjoying a pre-breakfast walk around the hotel grounds, we will head north of Siracusa to the promontory of Penisola Magnisi. This exposed coastal headland can become a superb migrant hotspot when conditions are favourable. The short, open vegetation is particularly attractive to wheatears, and we may find good numbers of Northern Wheatears alongside smaller numbers of Black-eared Wheatears. Stone-curlew and Calandra Lark breed in the area, while Short-toed Larks can often be found amongst the sparse vegetation. Offshore, we will scan for passing seabirds and may be fortunate enough to witness skuas pursuing gulls in spectacular aerial chases. We will also search for the elegant Audouin's Gull amongst the more numerous Yellow-legged Gulls.

We will then continue to the nearby Riserva Naturale Saline di Priolo, an internationally important wetland where Greater Flamingoes breed and Audouin's Gull is a regular visitor. The reserve supports an excellent diversity of waterbirds and frequently provides memorable wildlife encounters. After enjoying a picnic lunch, we will travel to the outskirts of Siracusa to visit the remarkable Greek Theatre and the surrounding Archaeological Park.

One of the finest and best-preserved theatres in the ancient Greek world, the Siracusa Greek Theatre is an unforgettable sight. Together with the extensive archaeological remains scattered throughout the park, it offers a fascinating insight into Sicily's rich and complex history. As we explore this extraordinary site, we will discover the legacy of the civilisations that have shaped the island over the centuries, providing a fitting cultural complement to the wildlife highlights of the day.

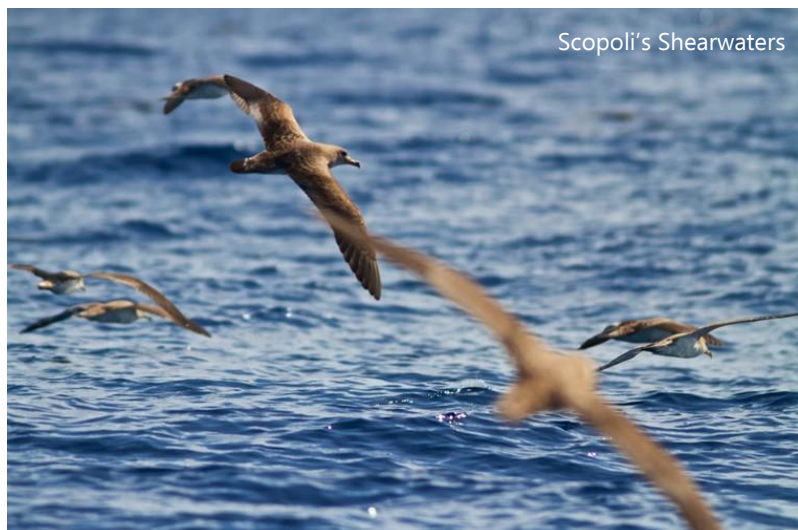


Siracusa Greek Theatre

Day 6

Capo Murro di Porco, Siracusa Salinas

Those wishing to make the most of the early morning light may enjoy a pre-breakfast walk around the trees, fields and gardens surrounding our accommodation. After breakfast, we will head to the nearby coastal headland of Capo Murro di Porco, one of the best localities for observing autumn migrants as they arrive on the island after crossing the Mediterranean. We will search the garrigue vegetation for recently arrived birds, with Northern and Black-eared Wheatears particularly likely in the more open areas. Denser patches of vegetation may conceal Collared and Pied Flycatchers, together with Wood and Subalpine Warblers. The old buildings scattered across the headland often host Blue Rock Thrushes and Moorish Geckos, while overhead we will watch for passing raptors. Montagu's Harriers may be seen quartering low over the scrub, while Lesser Kestrels and Red-footed Falcons often hunt insects higher above the landscape. We will also spend time seawatching, looking for passing Scopoli's and Yelkouan Shearwaters



Scopoli's Shearwaters

offshore, which may in turn attract the attention of an inquisitive skua.

After a picnic lunch, we will visit the nearby Siracusa Salinas, where a change of habitat brings a fresh selection of wildlife. The reedbeds can hold both Squacco and Purple Herons, while suitable water levels may attract a variety of passage waders, including Little Stint, Common Greenshank and Little Ringed Plover alongside resident Kentish Plovers. The reeds are also home to Great Reed Warblers, whose powerful song provides an interesting comparison with those of the smaller Sedge and Reed Warblers. Later, we will return to the hotel with time to relax before dinner. If conditions are favourable, we will once again run the moth-trap and look forward to discovering what nocturnal visitors have arrived by the following morning.

Day 7

Fly London

Depending on our flight time, there may be an opportunity for some final wildlife-watching before we leave Sicily. We may visit a nearby coastal headland or return to the Siracusa Salinas in search of newly arrived migrants, providing one last chance to enjoy the rich birdlife of this fascinating corner of the Mediterranean.

All too soon, it will be time to bid farewell to Siracusa and begin our journey north to Catania Airport for our return flight to the UK, bringing to a close a relaxing and rewarding week of wildlife, scenery and culture in south-eastern Sicily.

Tour Grading & Focus

All walks on this tour are optional and taken at a leisurely pace, with no demanding hiking involved. As all excursions consist of straightforward day walks, the tour is graded A.

Sicily offers a remarkable diversity of wildlife, and although birds are a particular focus during this autumn migration period, we will also take every opportunity to enjoy the island's rich variety of plants, butterflies, dragonflies, reptiles and other wildlife encountered along the way.

Weather, Clothing & Equipment

We can generally expect warm and pleasant weather at this time of year, although conditions can be variable. We therefore recommend bringing layers of clothing, including a warm fleece or jumper for cooler mornings and evenings, together with a waterproof jacket. Sturdy, comfortable walking shoes or walking boots are also advised for the range of habitats we will explore during the tour.

What's Included

Breakfasts and evening meals are included in the cost of the holiday, starting with dinner on Day 1 and concluding with breakfast on Day 7. Lunches will be taken as relaxed picnic meals enjoyed in the field, making the most of fresh seasonal produce and local Sicilian specialities wherever possible.

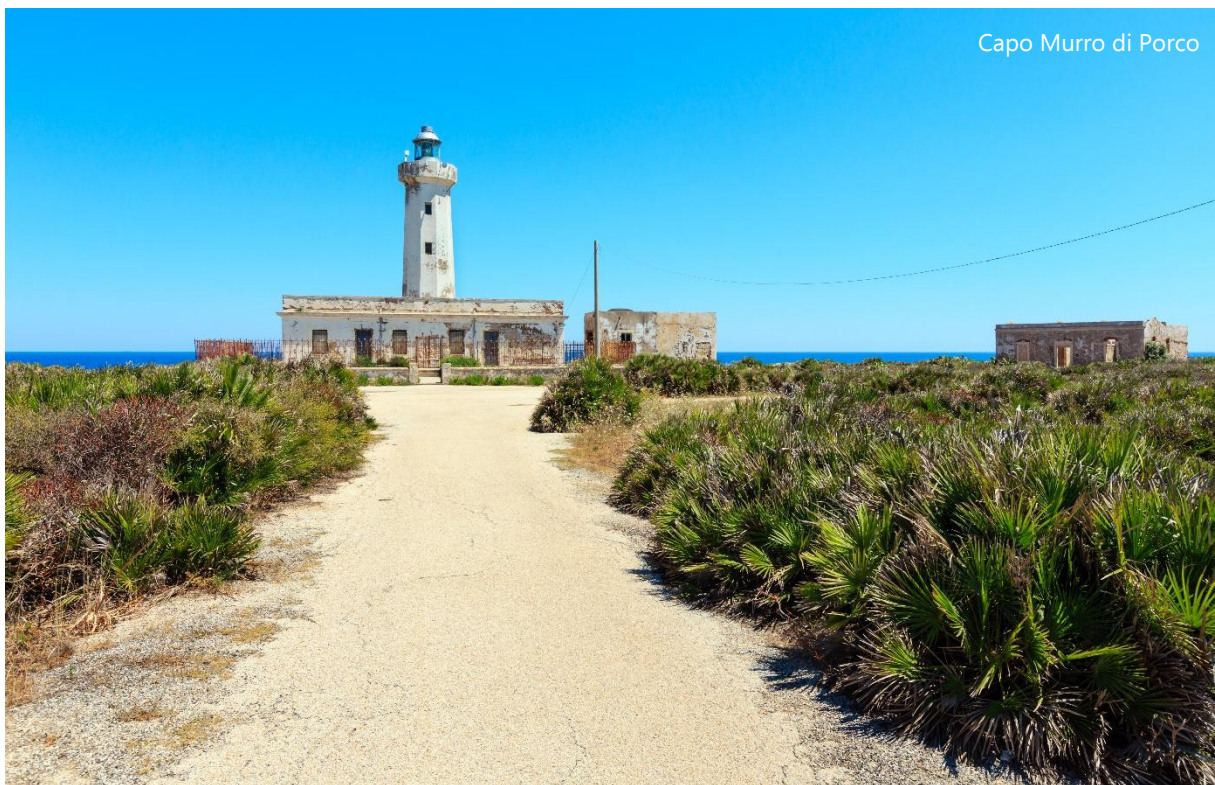
Dining is an important part of the experience, and throughout the tour we will enjoy a variety of authentic dishes that reflect the island's rich culinary heritage, providing the perfect accompaniment to our exploration of Sicily's wildlife, landscapes and culture.

Extending Your Holiday

We can happily book your flights to incorporate additional nights in Sicily. 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.



Capo Murro di Porco