

Go Slow on Sicily – Spring

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

April

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

- Woodchat Shrike, Subalpine Warbler and Bee-eater among a host of spring migrants
- Explore headlands for recently arrived migrants
- Moth-trapping
- Led by an expert naturalist

Collared Flycatcher



Orecchio di Dionisio (Ear of Dionysius)



Scarce Swallowtail



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Introduction

Sicily combines spectacular scenery, a rich cultural heritage and some of the finest spring wildlife in the Mediterranean. Positioned at the crossroads of Europe and Africa, the island acts as an important stepping stone for countless migrant birds making their way north each spring. At this season, coastal wetlands, headlands and open countryside can be alive with migrants, whilst the island's flower-rich landscapes are at their most colourful. The dramatic presence of Mount Etna, Europe's largest active volcano, adds further interest, creating a remarkable variety of habitats and contributing to the fertile soils that have shaped Sicily's landscapes and history for thousands of years.

Our holiday is designed in the spirit of a 'Go Slow' tour, allowing ample time to enjoy Sicily's wildlife, scenery and culture at a relaxed pace. We will be based throughout in a characterful 19th-century farmhouse, surrounded by vineyards and rolling countryside, providing a comfortable and welcoming base from which to explore. Daily excursions will be entirely optional, with opportunities to enjoy birdwatching, wildflowers and gentle walks, whilst those wishing to take things more slowly can relax at the accommodation and enjoy the peaceful surroundings. There may even be the opportunity to run a moth-trap in the grounds and discover some of Sicily's fascinating nocturnal wildlife after dark.



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 start our tour departing from London on our flight to Catania, midway along Sicily's east coast. With luck, the weather will be clear on our descent, and we will be treated to spectacular views of Mount Etna with its smoking summit. After arrival, we will complete the airport formalities before picking up our minibus for the week. We will head south towards Siracusa, where we will settle into our rooms at our hotel, the Agriturismo Pozzo di Mazza. Just 7km from Siracusa, we are in an area just outside the Plemmirio Marine Protected Area and just a very short drive from the Arenella and Fontane Bianche Beaches.

Sardinian Warbler



Depending upon our flight times, we may have time for a short walk around the gardens that surround our accommodation to try to catch our first sight of the many migrants that use the area to feed at this time of year. Likely birds include Serin serenading us with their twittering song, Woodchat Shrike keeping a beady eye out for passing prey and Sardinian Warbler playing hide-and-seek in the vegetation.

We will then have time for the group to get to know one another as we enjoy our first dinner. Rest assured that there will be nobody left feeling hungry as we are treated to an array of locally influenced cuisine!

Day 2

Capo Murro di Porco, Siracusa Salinas

Those wishing to make the best of the early morning light will no doubt want to explore the trees and fields around our accommodation with a pre-breakfast walk. After breakfast we will make our way to the nearby headland of Capo Murro di Porco, where we will search the headland garrigue vegetation for recently arrived migrants. Northern and Black-eared Wheatears can be anticipated in the more open areas, with the dense vegetation perhaps holding Collared and Pied Flycatchers, Wood and Subalpine Warblers. The derelict buildings give a home to Blue Rock Thrush and Moorish Gecko, and we will hope for passing birds of prey on the look-out for an easy meal. Montagu's Harriers skim low over the bushes while Lesser Kestrel and Red-footed Falcon are more likely to be searching for insects higher up in the sky.

We will break for a delicious picnic lunch before changing habitat to the nearby Siracusa Salinas. There we'll look for our first Squacco and Purple Herons in the reeds and, if the water levels are right, we can expect passage waders like Little Stint, Greenshank and Little Ringed Plover mixing with the local Kentish Plover. The reedbeds should provide us with our first sightings of Great Reed Warbler – we can compare their songs with those of Sedge and Reed Warblers.

We will return to the hotel to relax in time for dinner. Weather permitting, we will set the moth-trap to see what nocturnal delights are attracted in before bedtime.

Day 3

Cavagrande del Cassibile, Noto

If the moth trap was set, we will gather for a pre-breakfast look at our overnight haul and, no doubt, will be fascinated by the many amazingly intricate patterns displayed by the moths.

After breakfast, we will travel south before cutting inland to the Riserva Naturale Cavagrande del Cassibile. Here we will wind our way up steep mountain roads to arrive at an awesome viewpoint overlooking the spectacular limestone gorge, with its river many hundreds of feet below. We will use our vantage point to try to find the Rock Sparrows and Blue Rock Thrushes that nest amongst the cliffs, while keeping a sharp eye out for any raptors using the gorge as a natural flyway. Possible sightings include Peregrine and Lanner Falcon. After our coffee stop at the Rifugio, we will take a leisurely walk along the top of the gorge. Amongst the olive and almond groves, we will look for Cirl Bunting and any arriving migrants as Woodlarks deliver their wonderful fluty songs overhead.

After a hearty picnic lunch at the gorge, we will make our way to the beautiful Baroque town of Noto, widely regarded as one of Sicily's architectural gems and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Its honey-coloured limestone buildings glow warmly in the afternoon sunshine, creating a spectacular backdrop for a



leisurely stroll through the historic streets and piazzas. There will be time to admire the magnificent cathedral and elegant palaces, browse the small independent shops, or simply relax with a traditional Sicilian coffee or gelato while soaking up the atmosphere. Above us, vast numbers of House Martins and Swifts wheel through the streets, nesting in almost every available nook and cranny of the historic buildings.

We will return to the hotel with plenty of time to relax or explore the gardens before another delicious home-cooked meal. If the weather is favourable, we will once again set the moth-trap in anticipation of another fascinating morning.

Day 4

Vendicari, Marzamemi

After a look at the moth trap, or a pre-breakfast bird walk, we'll enjoy our breakfast before heading south for our first stop. Our target is the large coastal wetland of Vendicari, where we will leave the minibus at the reserve centre before exploring the wetland. There are several hides here that give good views across the large lakes and we will be looking for terns over the water, Marsh Harrier and Purple Heron in the reedbeds, and migrating warblers in the coastal juniper bushes. Of additional interest, there is also the 15th-century coastal tower built by Peter of Aragon.

After our picnic lunch, we will continue further south to explore a couple of the region's smaller wetlands. Although less well known than Vendicari, these quieter sites can be excellent for migrant birds and often produce some pleasant surprises. Depending on water levels and migration, we may encounter a variety of waders, herons and wildfowl, while the surrounding scrub and farmland can hold shrikes, wagtails and other spring migrants.

We will make our way to the picturesque fishing village of Marzamemi. One of Sicily's most charming coastal villages, its narrow streets, colourful fishing boats and attractive piazzas provide the perfect setting for a leisurely stroll and gelato before returning to our hotel for another relaxing evening.

Day 5

Pantani Cuba e Longarini

Today we will head to the very south of the island to explore the extensive private reserve at Pantani Cuba e Longarini. Here we will enjoy exclusive access to the lakes and scrapes, an excellent location for both breeding wetland species and passage migrants. Nesting Collared Pratincole, Kentish

Red-footed Falcon



Plover and Black-winged Stilt may be joined by passing Curlew Sandpiper and Temminck's Stint, while Gull-billed and Whiskered Terns can often be seen hawking gracefully over the water.

The extensive areas of scrub provide excellent habitat for passage flycatchers, warblers and

shrikes. Such concentrations of birds inevitably attract both resident and migrating raptors, with the ever-present Marsh Harrier joined by the likes of Montagu's Harrier, Red-footed Falcon and, with a little luck, perhaps even the elegant Lesser Kestrel.

While here, we will also take time to look for the elusive Western Swamphe (formerly known as Purple Gallinule), which breeds on the reserve, and enjoy the impressive gatherings of Greater Flamingoes and Slender-billed Gulls that can often be found feeding on the wetlands.

All too soon it will be time to make our way back to Siracusa, where there will be time to relax or explore the hotel gardens before another delicious evening meal. If conditions are favourable, we will once again set the moth-trap in anticipation of discovering another fascinating selection of Sicily's nocturnal wildlife the following morning.

Day 6 Penisola Magnisi, Saline di Priolo & Siracusa Archaeological Park

After a look at the moth-trap, or a pre-breakfast bird walk, we'll enjoy breakfast before heading north of Siracusa to the promontory of Penisola Magnisi. This coastal headland can, in the right weather conditions, become a magnet for migrating birds. As the vegetation is generally quite short, it is often alive with Northern Wheatears, together with smaller numbers of Black-eared Wheatears. Stone-curlew and Calandra Lark breed here, while Short-toed Lark can often be found hiding amongst the sparse vegetation. Offshore, we may be fortunate enough to witness skuas harassing the local gulls in pursuit of a meal, and we will also search for the elegant Audouin's Gull amongst the more numerous Yellow-legged Gulls.

We will then visit the hides at the nearby Riserva Naturale Saline di Priolo, where Greater Flamingoes breed in an impressive colony and Audouin's Gull is a regular visitor. This internationally important wetland supports an excellent variety of waterbirds and often produces some memorable wildlife encounters. Here we will enjoy another delicious picnic lunch before moving on to the outskirts of Siracusa to visit the truly unmissable Siracusa Greek Theatre and the surrounding Archaeological Park. The Greek Theatre, one of the finest and best-preserved examples anywhere in the Greek world, is a remarkable sight to behold. Together with the many other archaeological remains scattered throughout the park, it provides a fascinating insight into Sicily's rich and colourful past.

Day 7

Fly London

Depending on flight times, we might have the chance of a last stop to look for fresh migrants – either a visit to a headland near our accommodation or to Siracusa Salinas. We will then have to leave Siracusa to make our transfer journey north to Catania Airport for our return flight to the UK.

Tour Grading & Focus

All the walking involved in this tour will be day walks and will be optional; therefore, the holiday grade is A.

Sicily has a wide range of interest across the taxa and we'll take the opportunity to enjoy any exciting wildlife we come across along the way.

Weather, Clothing & Equipment

We can hope for fine weather at this time but the weather is, of course, unpredictable and we recommend bringing layers of clothing including a warm jumper/fleece and a waterproof jacket and waterproof walking boots.

What's Included

Breakfasts and evening meals are included in the holiday cost beginning with the evening meal on Day 1 and finishing with breakfast on Day 7. Lunches will be continental-style picnics eaten in situ, encompassing the very best of seasonal local produce where possible.

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.

