

# USA - Bobcats and Bears

## Naturetrek Itinerary

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### Outline itinerary

- Day 1** Fly London to New York, travel to Torrington, Connecticut
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- Day 2/7** Daily activities including walks with Black Bears, local birding and the wider natural history and night excursions for Bobcat.
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- Day 8** Travel to New York and Fly London
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- Day 9** Arrive London
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### Departs

June - September

### Dates and Prices

See website (tour code USA23)

### Grading

Grade A. A range of mostly gentle walks. All the walks are on largely flat terrain.

### Focus

Principally mammals, with emphasis on Bobcat and Black Bears but also the other wildlife of the area including American Beaver and a range of special birds including Bald Eagle.

### Highlights

- Unrivalled views of Bobcat
- Walk with Black Bears!
- Host of other mammals including Beavers
- Bald Eagle and a whole range of other special birds
- Fly to New York so a perfect extension option & whale watching in Boston possible



Bobcat, Black Bear, Scarlet Tanager



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## Introduction

This tour to the wildlife-rich state of Connecticut will focus on two spectacular and typically elusive species, the Bobcat and the Black Bear. We'll also hope to find a whole host of other special species along the way from American Beavers to the magnificent Bald Eagle.

Our base for this new tour lies only two hours from New York City, yet feels a world away from this crowded east coast metropolis. Within Connecticut's vast woodlands (over 60% of the state is forested) lives a wonderful variety of mammals and birds, including two of the region's most iconic species, the Bobcat and Black Bear. During this unique, single-centre, holiday we will join expert local guides and aim to enjoy intimate encounters with these two elusive predators. The photographic opportunities should be outstanding, as will the birding with a host of exciting species to look out for, from majestic Bald Eagles to colourful Baltimore Orioles.

From New York we will head north into Connecticut. Our base for the next seven nights will be a simple, but comfortable, hotel a short drive from the key forest sites. It is within these forests that we stand our best chance of an encounter with a Bobcat, a beautiful and secretive feline which looks not unlike a diminutive Lynx. We will be aided in our quest by researchers who have habituated certain individuals by tempting them into a woodland clearing with small amounts of food. The researchers will alert us when a Bobcat appears and we will join them to share in their unrivalled close views.

We will also join our guides for gentle forest walks in search of Black Bears. Once again, we will hope for excellent sightings, but will be sure to keep a respectful distance, closely following our guide's lead at all times. If fortunate, we may even encounter a mother with cubs! Whether we locate just one or many more individuals, the chance to observe wild Black Bears whilst on foot is a truly magical and unforgettable experience.

Away from these two star species we will search for a mouth-watering array of other wildlife. Bald Eagles are highly likely, along with such striking birds as Scarlet Tanager, Black-and-White Warbler, Indigo Bunting and the exquisite Ruby-throated Hummingbird. We also stand a very high chance of finding North American Beaver during the tour and, for those who wish to extend their time in the US, options include birding in New York's famous Central Park and whale-watching out of Boston.

## Itinerary

*Please note that the following itinerary 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 New York and transfer Torrington, Connecticut

We will leave London Heathrow today on our direct flight to New York, arriving in the middle of day. We will then drive for around 2 hours to our hotel in Torrington, Connecticut, our base for the next seven nights. We will settle into our rooms and have some time to relax. For those that wish, we may take a short walk close to the hotel in search of our first birds which may include American Robin, Dark-eyed Junco, Blue Jay or maybe White-breasted Nuthatch. We will have dinner together and will then hope for a call to alert us to a Bobcat sighting!

The Bobcat sites lie within a 10-25 minute drive of the hotel and we will wait to be contacted when an animal appears at one of the study sites rather than waiting there ourselves. Each time a Bobcat appears they typically stay at the site for 75-120 minutes, giving us ample time to drive to the site and walk a short distance to view this stunning cat. We can never predict when the call will come so some late nights are to be expected on this tour. There is a chance of daytime views, but far more likely, are views after dark. The area where we will hope to see the Bobcat, has soft lighting and photography is possible without the use of flash. The Bobcat is one of the world's four species of the genus *Lynx* and in this case the scientific name is *Lynx rufus*. Older common names for this cat species include Bay Lynx, in honor of the distinctively-rufous wash of its summer pelage. During the course of our holiday we will be offered unprecedented opportunities to see this typically elusive species at close quarters and this routine will be offered during each night of our holiday.



Bobcat

## Days 2 – 3

## Wildlife Activities

The next two days will follow a similar routine with a slower start factored in depending on how late we have been up hoping for Bobcats. For those wishing for some early morning birding, we will enjoy coffee, tea, fruit, and bakery items at the hotel before we head out into the field to find a range of special species sure to raise the excitement level for any UK birder! Species we hope to encounter include Bald Eagle, Great Blue Heron, Red-tailed Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, Northern Cardinal, American Goldfinch, Baltimore Oriole, Scarlet Tanager, Indigo Bunting, Wild Turkey, Eastern Bluebird, Tree Swallow, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Blue-headed Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Northern Yellowthroat, American Redstart, Black-and-White Warbler, and possibly Black-throated-Green Warbler too!



Ruby-throated Hummingbird

Midway through the morning outing, we will enjoy a hot breakfast out in the field, as that is certainly the most efficient way to get the most out of our day. We will continue enjoying the woodland edges, meadows and open ground to enjoy a broad range of natural history including birds, butterflies, frogs, salamanders and wildflowers. There is also the chance we will encounter a Black Bear in the forest and field edges. We will hope to be contacted by field scouts who will report any bear sightings so that we can track them through the forest on foot.

We will then return to the hotel for some rest time for those who wish before taking a hot lunch at one of several restaurants that lie within a very short drive of the hotel. After lunch and a little more time to re-charge our batteries, we will head out again for a further afternoon of wildlife watching, which will last until just before dusk. Again, we will be searching for birds and keeping a look out for Black Bears and anything else we may find. Six woodpecker species reside in the forests here: Red-bellied, Downy, Pileated and Hairy Woodpecker, as well as Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Northern Flicker. There is also a chance of encountering White-tailed Deer and both Red and Grey Fox. In wet areas and pools we may find Eastern Newts and Wood Frogs and we aim to enjoy a broad range of the area's natural history.



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker

Following the afternoon activity, we will head straight out for a hot dinner and will then return to the hotel to relax and get some sleep as we await news from our friends in the field.

On both evenings we will be on call for sightings of Bobcats and by the second night, it is highly likely that at least one will have made an appearance. The Bobcat can reach a maximum size of 52 pounds (24 kilos) and it can kill an adult White-tailed Deer, though that is not common. It is a powerful, resourceful, and normally extremely timid predator of the forests of temperate and subtropical North America. Each of our days will follow a similar routine as outlined above in an aim to see as much as possible whilst also factoring in sufficient rest time.

## Day 4

This morning, we will likely focus our efforts on locating Bald Eagles, as there are several sites nearby that offer spectacular viewing and photographic opportunities. Connecticut is only around 6% of the size of the United Kingdom, yet now boasts 64 Bald Eagle nests. A good number of these are located close to our base so chances of great views and photos are very high indeed. We may then carry on to the White Memorial Conservation Center. Located only around 20 minutes from our hotel, we may visit this site two or three times during our holiday as the area boasts a superb array of habitats to explore, and we're likely to encounter new species during every visit. Here, 4000 acres of forest, meadows, lakes, grassland and open wetlands are protected and teem with wildlife. Over 200 species of bird have been recorded and there is an extensive network of trails to enjoy. We may find such species as Wood Duck, Cedar Waxwing, Grey Catbird, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Common Yellowthroat, Chestnut-sided Warbler and Ovenbird to name but a few. Raptors may include Sharp-shinned Hawk and Cooper's Hawk. North American Porcupine and Eastern Striped Skunks are frequently sighted in this area and we will of course be hoping to find these mammals and others as we enjoy the birds and wider natural history of the area.

In the afternoon, we will return to the woodlands and prime bear viewing areas and will be on call as we hope for more Black Bear sightings. The probability of seeing at least one Black Bear while we are out birding and butterflying is very high, and the sites we visit with our guides are very well known to them, with the bears completely relaxed around human presence. We shall spend our time scanning the forests on foot, walking calmly and silently to watch the bears foraging naturally for nuts and acorns on the forest floor often only 12-30 metres away. Our small group of up to 12 guests, with our expert guide, will be the only people watching the bears, offering us wonderful intimate encounters. To be on foot and watching such a magnificent animal at close quarters is a truly magical experience. The bears will ignore us and will continue their natural behavior as if we were not there. No food has ever been left out for these bears so they will have no interest in us at all.

We will once again return to have dinner and a chance for relaxation and sleep at our hotel. Those who wish will again be alerted to any Bobcat activity this evening and will travel the short distance to view them should an animal arrive.

## Days 5

Today will follow a similar routine and depending on our success with Bald Eagles the previous day, we may visit another site for them, also hoping to catch up with some other species that may have previously eluded us such as Belted Kingfisher, Rose-breasted Grosbeak and maybe some striking wood warblers such as Black-throated Blue Warbler and Black-throated Green Warbler.



Bald Eagle

Nearby, we will also have a good chance to observe North American Beavers and during the tour we will aim to see these amazing mammals on either early morning or evening outings. There are a number of sites where we stand a very good chance of observing the beavers but patience will be required for success. This is yet another special mammal we hope to encounter on this holiday!

We may take another walk at the White Memorial Conservation Center and will again await news of a Bobcat sighting at one of the research sites. As we walk to the Bobcat viewing area, we will also have the chance to see Northern Flying Squirrel which often visits a feeder positioned high on a tree here. Barred Owl may also be encountered, and we will always be aiming to see as much as we can as well as the key star species.

## Day 6

Today we will react to our previous day's sightings and will focus our efforts on locating any new species that may have eluded us so far. We may spend time in more open dry grasslands in the hope of locating species which are scarcer in the area such as Bobolinks and Grasshopper Sparrow. We'll also visit some wetter areas for Red-winged Blackbirds.

There are also some nearby locations where we will have a chance to see the Groundhog, also known as Woodchuck, which is a member of the marmot family. These endearing creatures can be quite reliable in certain areas and we shall try our best to find them.



Black Bear cubs

Observing and walking with the Black Bears is such a special experience that even if we have been successful on previous days, we will spend time again today in the forests, enjoying relaxed walks and reacting to any sightings that may be reported to us.

Once again, we will enjoy dinner together and will have some time to relax and sleep before awaiting calls of the Bobcat. It may well be that we have already achieved wonderful views by this stage of the holiday, but the opportunity will still be there for anyone who would like some more sightings.

## Days 7

Today our sites will depend on our fortunes over the previous days. We may try our luck for more Bald Eagles and other birds, or possibly make another attempt for Beavers. We will continue to explore the wide range of habitats within a 45-minute drive of the hotel. We will look to factor in one last chance for Black Bears in the late afternoon to near dusk and will then be on call for Bobcats for one final time.



North American Beaver

Looking at the averages, we hope to see Bobcats on at least 4 of the 7 nights we will spend in Connecticut, possibly even on 6 or 7 of the nights if we are very fortunate. There is therefore always the option to dip out of a night time session for those who wish. The Bobcats usually show before 11 pm, but there are nights when they decide to arrive at 1, 2 or even 3am. You can request not to be woken past a certain hour, and there will be plenty of flexibility with this.

## Day 8

## Final exploration and fly London

Today we will have one last opportunity to enjoy the superb habitats of the area and we'll take a relaxed walk to search for any final birds, butterflies, reptiles, amphibians and mammals that may cross our path. After lunch we will set off for New York to check in for our direct overnight flight home.

## Day 9

## Arrive London

We will land into London this morning.

## Tour Grading and Focus

Grade A. This is a conventional wildlife viewing tour but please note that some of the excursions will take place at night along forest tracks. Group members will only need to be able to walk 1-1.5

km on quite flat terrain for the Bobcat and Black Bear activities. Walks will be relaxed and slow paced as we explore the surrounding habitats and wildlife.

This is an escorted natural history holiday and one of the main objectives will be to provide participants with observations of Bobcat and Black Bear in the wild. With the aid of local expertise every effort will be made to locate them but even on the most favourable of days it is unlikely that the animals will be viewable for more than a fraction of the time spent in the field. At all times due attention will be paid to the wider natural history of the area and as the most conspicuous and widespread members of the fauna, it is probable that a significant amount of time will be spent looking at birds. Avid birders should carefully note, however, that the principal focus of this holiday are the mammals and should be aware that whilst an excellent selection of birds is likely to be seen, this is not a designated 'birding' as may be found elsewhere in the Naturetrek programme. Please do not hesitate to talk to the Operations Manager if you have any doubts about the suitability of this tour.

## More on Connecticut and its wildlife

Twenty-eight of the 50 US States harbour American Black Bears, but of the states that support over 1,000 individuals each, only Connecticut has banned all hunting of bears since at least the extirpation of the species in the 1850's. Black Bears only started to move back into the north west corner of this small New England state in the early-to-mid 1990's. Some other states, such as Florida and New Jersey, have allowed "sport hunting" of Black Bears at some point over the last 6 years, but Connecticut is alone in the entire USA in having such a high density of bears in the state (1,200 at recent count) and yet has continued to ban hunting of any kind since the bears returned to the state 30 years ago. As detailed economic studies in the Great Bear Rainforest of Canada show, bear viewing produces at least 12 times more economic activity than bear hunting and we hope that our eco-tourism in Connecticut will help prove this further locally so that hunting will never return.

Bobcats are not hunted or trapped for fur in Connecticut, whereas they are persecuted in many of the other US states in which they occur. The lack of hunting of Bobcats and bears in Connecticut means that the state is now one of the most exciting, yet so far little recognised, destinations in North America for observing these magnificent top predators. The bears that we watch are very relaxed around us as we move slowly and quietly on foot from a distance of roughly 10-35 metres, and we are of little interest to them as they continue to forage and observe their natural behaviours. The state is now 62% reforested, in a fantastic example of rewilding which has been continually expanded since the mid-1800's. This wildlife rich, corner of the state offers unparalleled wildlife experiences which we shall enjoy throughout the holiday.

## Weather

The climate of Connecticut largely mirrors that of the UK, although over the summer months the state may experience more regular spells of warm weather reaching 31, 32 or 33° in the heat of the day which happen less frequently in the UK.

## Food & accommodation

Accommodation is provided in a clean and comfortable tourist hotel offering double and twin-bedded rooms with private facilities. Rooms for single occupancy are available. The hotel is chosen for its location and ease to reach the Bobcat sites and is an efficient and comfortable tourist hotel.

All food is included in the price of the tour starting with dinner on Day 1 and ending with lunch on Day 8. Dinner will be eaten at local restaurants and lunches will be a mixture of packed lunches and dining at local restaurants. Light breakfasts will be provided at the hotel and often a hot breakfast will also be provided in the field.

## Flights from London

We will use scheduled direct flights between London Heathrow and New York as standard.

## Extensions

Should you wish to spend longer in the USA we can arrange that for you. Boston is accessible for some superb whale watching or you might wish to visit New York for some Central Park birding, shows and sightseeing.

## More on Mammal Watching

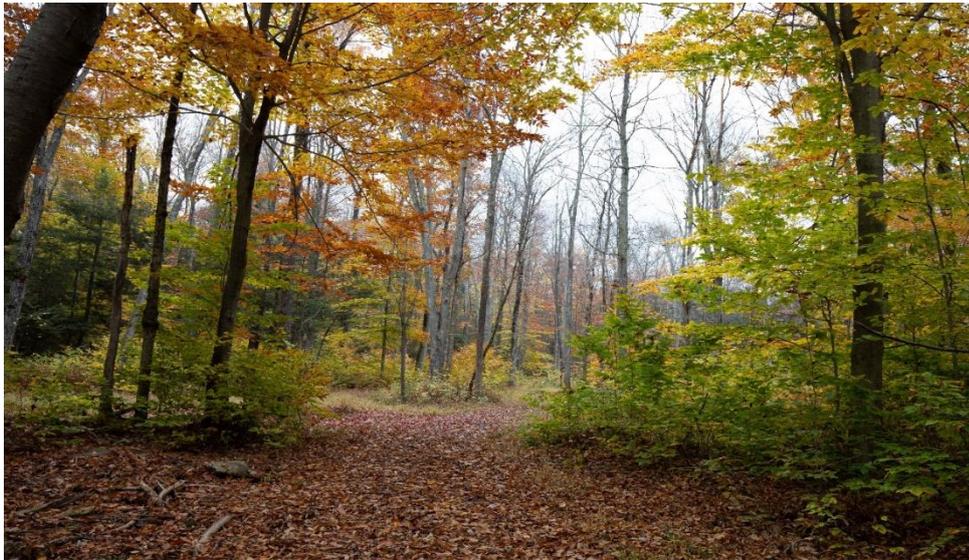
On average Bobcats are usually sighted on around 80% of the evenings so we should have an excellent chance of success, although of course, as with anything in nature, nothing can be absolutely guaranteed! We will also have a very high chance of some special encounters with Black Bears throughout the week. Efforts will be made to find and watch some of the lesser-known mammals that are also mentioned above. Please do be aware that mammals often only show for a fraction of our time in the field and so we will be spending our outstanding time birdwatching and enjoying everything we find which may include butterflies, reptiles and amphibians; all the while watching for more mammals as we enjoy them. The photo here shows a typical view after dark and the lighting will often allow for brighter photos than shown here. The photos of Bobcat and Black Bear in the itinerary have all been taken at the sites we shall visit.



Bobcat

## 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](http://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.



Forests of Connecticut