

The Somerset Levels in Spring

Naturetrek Tour Report

8th – 10th April 2026



Black-tailed Godwit



Wren



Great Egret



Long-tailed Tit

Tour report by Simon Breeze



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Tour participants: Simon Breeze (leader) with six Naturetrek clients

Summary

Over three spring days on the Somerset Levels, we explored the Avalon Marshes and the wet grazing landscapes south of the Polden Hills, enjoying a wide range of classic wetland birds at RSPB Ham Wall and Greylake, SWT Westhay and Catcott, and in the surrounding moors. Highlights included Marsh Harriers quartering daily, Great Egrets, a smart Garganey, and memorable encounters with Cranes, along with the soundtrack of singing warblers.

Day 1

Wednesday 8th April

Swan Hotel, Wells

Our base for this tour was Wells, staying at the six-hundred-year-old Swan Hotel located within England's smallest city. The group meet at 6.30am for introductions and an outline of what lay ahead. The leader explained the geography, history and ornithological significance of the Somerset Levels, before going through the itinerary for the days ahead. After that, it was time for a delicious three-course dinner, before heading to our bedrooms in anticipation of an early start.

Day 2

Thursday 9th April

RSPB Ham Wall – Avalon Marshes Centre – SWT Westhay

After a tasty cooked breakfast, we set off for the RSPB reserve at Ham Wall. Spring was in full swing, and the first part of our walk produced a pleasing mix of warbler song along the trees lining the main footpath: Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps were soon joined by a Garden Warbler, while a Cetti's Warbler 'shouted' from the reedbed edge and our first Reed Warbler rattled from within. Above the pools, hundreds of Swallows and Sand Martins swept back and forth, with a Marsh Harrier quartering low over the vegetation and a Great Egret drifting past in the distance.

From the first screens, we enjoyed close views of nesting Great Crested Grebes, with a Little Grebe calling nearby. A very confident Wren then stole the show, singing its heart out in the open from a gatepost. Moving on to the first viewpoint (VP1), we scanned a selection of wetland birds including Ring-necked Duck, Teal, Black-tailed Godwit and Lapwing. A Spotted Redshank was also picked out later in the day as we passed VP1.

At the Avalon Hide, we settled in for a longer watch, and were rewarded with excellent views of Marsh Harriers as they worked the reedbeds. A Crane passed through, adding a touch of drama, and from deeper in the reeds the distinctive calls of Bearded Reedlings carried across the water. In the adjacent alder carr, a Willow Warbler flitted among the taller trees, keeping up its sweet song. Bittern called deep within the reedbeds throughout the morning's walk, unfortunately not breaking cover.

We had lunch at the Avalon Marshes Centre, a welcome chance to refuel before heading on to Somerset Wildlife Trusts (SWT) Westhay reserve. Here, Marsh Harriers again patrolled the pools and several Great Egrets were in evidence, while large numbers of non-biting midges skated across the water's surface in the calmer corners. Later, we drove around Tealham and Tadham Moors, enjoying classic Levels scenery with a hovering Kestrel, passing

Goldfinches and Linnets, and Skylarks singing above meadows scattered with blooming Cuckoo-flowers. Back in Wells, another fine meal and great conversation rounded off a thoroughly rewarding first day.

Day 3

Friday 10th April

RSPB Greylake – RSPB Swell Wood – Wild Athelney – SWT Catcott Hide

After another enjoyable breakfast, we boarded the van and headed to the part of the Somerset Levels to the south of the Polden Hills. Here, the landscape primarily comprises seasonally-flooded wet grazing marsh.

Our first destination was the RSPB reserve at Greylake, where we visited the two main hides and began sorting through the wildfowl on the pools. A smart Garganey was the highlight, feeding amongst Egyptian, Canada and Greylag Geese, with a few lingering Teals still present. Marsh Harriers regularly quartered across the marsh, and a Peregrine made a swift, purposeful pass. A distant Crane stood at the back of the wet grassland, but the day's best Crane moment came as we walked back towards the car park: a small flock circled overhead, calling with gravelly, trumpet-like notes, before dropping down to feed in a nearby field, giving everyone an excellent final look.

From Greylake, we moved on to Swell Wood, an attractive old woodland best known for its heronry, the largest in the south-west. We enjoyed watching the nesting Grey Herons, and also had fantastic close views of woodland passerines at the feeding area, including Great, Blue and Coal Tits, Chaffinch and Nuthatch, along with a Great Spotted Woodpecker. A Marsh Tit was heard, and a Treecreeper gave a brief glimpse as it spiraled up a trunk. The woodland floor was bejewelled with spring flowers, with Common and Early Dog-violets, Wood Anemone, Primrose, Bluebells and Lesser Celandine adding colour beneath the trees. Two of the group also caught up with a singing Stock Dove deep in the wood, and from the viewpoint over West Sedgemoor we managed more, albeit distant, views of Cranes out on the moor.

We then had lunch at the King Alfred in Burrowbridge, where the staff were exceptionally friendly, and the 'chunky' sandwiches went down very well with the whole group.

After lunch we made a brief stop at Wild Athelney, a local rewilding site managed by Somerset Wildlands, to observe the early stages of vegetation regeneration. Skylarks were in full voice overhead, while gulls passed through regularly, including Lesser Black-backed Gulls, with Blackcaps and Chiffchaffs singing from most tree lines.

Our final birding stop was the SWT Catcott Hide. We arrived just in time to avoid a heavy rain shower and watched as Marsh Harriers and Great Egrets drifted across the marsh; best of all was a stunning Black-tailed Godwit in full breeding plumage feeding close to the hide.

A pleasant drive back through the Avalon Marshes brought us to Wells, where everyone was dropped at the hotel. We said our farewells after an enjoyable and wildlife-rich few days on the Levels.

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Species lists

Birds (H=heard only)

I=Introduced	Common name	Scientific name	April 2026	
			9	10
	Canada Goose - I	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓	✓
	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	✓	✓
	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓	✓
	Egyptian Goose - I	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>		✓
	Garganey	<i>Spatula querquedula</i>		✓
	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	✓	✓
	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	✓	✓
	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>	H	
	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓
	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	✓	✓
	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	✓	✓
	Ring-necked Duck	<i>Aythya collaris</i>	✓	
	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	✓	✓
	Common Pheasant - I	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	✓	✓
	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓
	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>		✓
	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓
	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓
	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	✓	✓
	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	✓	✓
	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓	✓
	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	✓	✓
	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	✓	
	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	✓	✓
	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	✓	✓
	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	✓	✓
	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	✓	
	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	✓	
	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓
	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓
	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓	✓
	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	✓
	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓
	Eurasian Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>	H	H
	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	✓	✓
	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	✓	✓
	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓
	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>		✓
	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	✓	✓
	Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>		✓
	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>		✓
	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	✓	
	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	✓	✓
	European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	✓	✓
	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	
	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		✓
	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	✓	✓

I=Introduced	Common name	Scientific name	April 2026	
			9	10
	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓
	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓
	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓
	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓
	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	
	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	✓	✓
	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>		H
	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>	✓	✓
	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓
	Bearded Reedling	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>	H	
	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓	✓
	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	✓	✓
	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓
	Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	
	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	✓	✓
	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	✓	✓
	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	✓	✓
	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓
	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>		✓
	Common Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	✓	✓
	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓	✓
	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>	✓	
	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	✓	✓
	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓
	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	✓	✓
	Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	✓	✓
	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓
	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓	✓
	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓
	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓
	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓
	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓
	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓	✓
	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓
	Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓
	Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>		✓
	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓	✓
	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓
	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓
	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>	✓	

Amphibians

Common name	Scientific name	April 2026	
		9	10
Common Frog	<i>Rana temporaria</i>	✓	

Insects

Common name	Scientific name	April 2026	
		9	10
Non-biting Midge	<i>Chironomidae</i> sp.	✓	
St Mark's Fly	<i>Bibio marci</i>	✓	

Selected plants

Common name	Scientific name	April 2026	
		9	10
Wood Anemone	<i>Anemone nemorosa</i>		✓
Horseradish	<i>Armoracia rusticana</i>		✓
Cuckoo-flower	<i>Cardamine pratensis</i>	✓	✓
Bluebell	<i>Hyacinthoides non-scripta</i>		✓
Bargeman's Cabbage	<i>Nasturtium officinale</i>	✓	✓
Primrose	<i>Primula vulgaris</i>		✓
Greater Stitchwort	<i>Stellaria holostea</i>		✓
Comfrey	<i>Symphytum officinale</i>	✓	✓
Early Dog Violet	<i>Viola reichenbachiana</i>		✓
Common Dog Violet	<i>Viola riviniana</i>		✓