

# The Best of Dorset's Wildlife

Naturetrek Tour Report

21 - 24 May 2019



Badger



Kimeridge and thrift



Smooth Snake



Marsh Fritillary

Report and photos compiled by Jon Stokes



Naturetrek Mingledown Barn Wolf's Lane Chawton Alton Hampshire GU34 3HJ UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: [info@naturetrek.co.uk](mailto:info@naturetrek.co.uk)

W: [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk)

Tour participants: Jon Stokes (Leader) with eight Naturetrek clients

## Day 1

Tuesday 21st May

The group gathered after lunch at the hotel having arrived by train and car, and then we set off for our first destination – Portland. The leader's family come from Portland where they have lived for at least 500 years, so en-route there was much talk of the Island, smuggling and the history of this part of Dorset. On arrival we looked over the Jurassic coast and particularly the spectacular Chesil Beach and the Fleet, a tombolo which links Portland to the mainland.

In the adjacent abandoned quarries from which all the Portland Limestone has been quarried over centuries, we then searched for butterflies finding Adonis Blues, Common Blues, Dingy and Grizzled Skippers and plenty of Wall Browns which are now restricted on the mainland but common on Portland. The plants at our feet were a glorious mixture of vetches with Horseshoe Vetch (*Hippocrepis comosa*) and Birds-foot Trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*) being the most abundant, and a fantastic display of Sainfoin (*Onobrychis viciifolia*), whose stunning pink flowers blew gracefully in the wind.

A Golden Oriole had been present on and off all morning, but we couldn't locate this so we went down to Church Ope Cove to look out at the east of the Island. Here Common Broomrape (*Orobanche minor*) and Ivy Broomrape (*Orobanche hederae*) were growing together and overhead the Ravens called as they passed gracefully.

Our next stop was a quick look for the Wall Lizards which grace the eastern side of the Island and here we found three on a rock, sunning themselves in the late afternoon sun, before we went out to Portland Bill.

At the Bill, Gannets and Fulmar were passing plus the occasional Kittiwake. On the cliffs Guillemots and Razorbills were flying onto the sea for an evening wash, and a large party of Ravens were feeding on the grass close to us. There were also Wheatears around on the land and offshore a Grey Seal passed by.

Finally we adjourned back 'underhill' (as the north of the Island is called) and stopped for dinner in the Cove Inn. This pub is in one of the nicest locations in the UK atop Chesil Beach and as we ate, the sun set in in a blaze of colour.

Following a great meal, we returned to the hotel tired but happy with our first day in the beautiful Dorset countryside.

## Day 2

Wednesday 22nd May

Our first destination this morning was Durlston Country Park, but as we headed there we were treated to the bizarre sight of a Roe Deer charging down the middle of the main street in Swanage, before diving into somebody's garden.

At Durlston the cliffs abounded with seabirds and we watched hundreds of Guillemots and Razorbills, while a stunning Peregrine cruised past below us. The air was alive with the sounds of Lesser Whitethroats and Whitethroats, Linnets and Greenfinches and many Dunnocks called from their hiding places in the shrubs.

On the cliff tops, as on Portland, vetches abounded but here there were Green-winged Orchids (*Anacamptis morio*), the gone over flower heads of Early Spider Orchids (*Ophrys sphegodes*) and the first Common Spotted Orchids (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*).

From Durlston we went to the beautiful community of Kimmeridge, where after an excellent lunch we visited the new Fossil Museum to explore the geology of the Jurassic Coast. Here the fossils were frankly astonishing and it was great to talk to the Museum's creator and the finder of all the fossils, who gave us an impromptu lecture of the treasures within the Museum.

Then we went down to see the fossil beds in Kimmeridge Bay itself, finding only traces of a few Ammonites, before visiting the Dorset Wildlife Trust Marine Centre in the Bay which is the only Marine Nature Reserve in the UK with its own underwater nature trail.

From Kimmeridge we returned to the hotel and collected our picnic supper and set off for our last destination of the day – a badger hide in the middle of the county. After settling in and watching a few Hares and Rabbits on the adjacent fields, we polished off a good percentage of the sandwiches and flapjack before the Badgers appeared. Went they came, there were two very smart Badgers who put on a great display, feeding and poking around very close to the hide giving everybody (including the four party members who had never seen a Badger) fantastic views of these beautiful creatures.

As we walked back to the car, a Little Owl called, before we returned to the hotel and retired to bed.

## Day 3

Thursday 23rd May

Our first stop today was at the RSPB reserve at Arne. Here a Woodlark flew as we parked and as we got out of the van, Dartford Warblers called their scratchy calls. Walking across the heath we had excellent views of Stonechats and then one male started singing from the top of a small pine tree in which a Dartford Warbler also sang from a few feet below him.

At this point Jon spotted a superb Osprey which was feeding in the harbour. This individual is one of the Leicestershire birds that has taken up residence in Poole Harbour and is waiting for a mate to turn up, to hopefully start the breeding of Ospreys again in Poole, about a hundred years after they last bred.

We then undertook some serious investigation of the heath's reptiles, seeing Common and Sand Lizards and then under a piece of roofing felt, a stunning Smooth Snake. Because Smooth Snakes are a protected species, we were part of an inspection of the heathland's population of snakes organized by the RSPB and Graham our guide was a super 'snake wrangler' allowing fantastic views of this rare species.

More Dartford Warblers and Sand Lizards followed, before lunch at the reserves centre. Here in the flowers was a great display of beetles with Brassica Shieldbug (*Eurydema oleracea*) and a Longhorn Beetle called *Stenurella melanura* being the highlights.

Our next stop was for more butterflies, visiting the Butterfly Conservation Reserve of Alners Gorse. Here at this amazing reserve, were a collection of butterflies including Dingy Skippers and Common Blues and an amazing

number of Marsh Fritillaries. These superb butterflies were everywhere over the reserve, showing all aspects of their behaviour. Quite stunning.

Returning to the hotel we had dinner, and for those with energy we then went back to Arne to look for Nightjars. Upon arrival we found Common and Soprano Pipistrelles and a pair of Serotines which chased each other around our heads. Calling from the heath we could hear Nightjars all around us and overhead Woodcocks croaked, but we couldn't see one. We moved around for a bit over the heathland until we could hear a relatively close Nightjar and then set off on foot to see if we could see it. Arriving where we thought we might get a good view, we discovered that we still couldn't find the birds and so set off back to the van. However as we walked we realised that the calls we could hear weren't distant Woodcocks, but were in fact the contact calls of close flying Nightjars and at that moment a pair of birds began displaying and wing clapping around our heads - at times as close as 10 feet away from us. The next 30 minutes was truly magical with at times three or four birds flying around us squawking, wing clapping and calling. Breath-taking. Eventually we had to give up and returned back to the hotel – after the highlight of any bird watching trip in the UK.

## Day 4

Friday 24th May

Our last day dawned (as had the whole week), with a hot and sunny start and we headed for the Ferrybridge on the Fleet. Here amid drifts of Thrift (*Armeria maritima*) Skylarks called and as we watched a flock of about 50 Little Terns flew around from their beach nest sites. Also flying across the fleet were Common and Sandwich Terns and a Grey Plover stood on the edge of the sea.

At Radipole Cetti's Warblers were simply everywhere giving amazing views, and from the reeds Sedge and Reed Warblers sang with gusto. Alongside the path was Dovesfoot Cranesbill (*Geranium molle*) and the poisonous nature of the *Hemlock water dropwort* (*Oenanthe crocata*) was discussed.

From the end of the path a family of Bearded Tits gave reasonable views and Reed Buntings called as they flew, before we were surprised by a Weasel which exploded out of the reeds near our feet before disappearing in as rapid a manner as it appeared.

Then we watched a frankly surprising bit of bird behaviour as a Great Black-backed Gull drowned and then ate a Herring Gull, stripping its corpse as it floated in the river. Truly nature red in bill and claw!

Lodmoor was next stop, where Mediterranean Gulls and Common Terns loafed around in the afternoon sun, but eventually we took our leave and went to the Lookout Café to close out our holiday, looking over the bay towards Portland and Chesil where we had seen so much interesting wildlife. A great way to end a few days in the superb Dorset countryside.

## Receive our e-newsletter

Join the Naturetrek e-mailing list and be the first to hear about new tours, additional departures and new dates, tour reports and special offers. Visit [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk) to sign up.

## Species Lists

Birds (✓=recorded but not counted; I = Introduced species)

	Common name	Scientific name	May			
			21	22	23	24
1	Canada Goose - I	<i>Branta canadensis</i>		✓		✓
2	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>			✓	✓
3	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>			✓	✓
4	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>			✓	✓
5	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>			✓	✓
6	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓	✓	✓
7	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>		✓	✓	✓
8	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>		✓	✓	
9	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>		✓		✓
10	Common Scoter	<i>Melanitta nigra</i>	✓			
11	Red-legged Partridge - I	<i>Alectoris rufa</i>		✓		
12	Common Pheasant - I	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>		✓		
13	Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>	✓	✓	✓	
14	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>		✓	✓	✓
15	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>		✓	✓	✓
16	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		✓	✓	✓
17	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		✓	✓	✓
18	Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>	✓	✓		
19	European Shag	<i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i>	✓	✓		
20	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓	✓		✓
21	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>			✓	
22	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>				
23	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓		✓	✓
24	Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>				✓
25	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>			✓	✓
26	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>			✓	✓
27	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	✓			✓
28	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>		✓		✓
29	Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>				✓
30	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>				✓
31	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>				✓
32	Black-legged Kittiwake	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>	✓	✓		
33	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	✓	✓		
34	Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
35	European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
36	Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
37	Sandwich Tern	<i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i>		✓		✓
38	Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>				✓
39	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>		✓		✓
40	Common Guillemot	<i>Uria aalge</i>	✓	✓		
41	Razorbill	<i>Alca torda</i>	✓	✓		
42	Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>	✓			
43	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓		✓
44	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	✓	✓		✓
45	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
46	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	May			
			21	22	23	24
47	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	✓		✓	✓
48	Tawny Owl	<i>Strix aluco</i>	✓	✓		
49	Little Owl - I	<i>Athene noctua</i>		✓		
50	European Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>			✓	
51	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
52	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>			✓	
53	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓		✓
54	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		✓		
55	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		✓	✓	
56	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
57	Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
58	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
59	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
60	Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓		
61	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		✓	✓	
62	Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓	
63	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓	
64	Bearded Reedling	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>				✓
65	Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>			✓	
66	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
67	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
68	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
69	Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
70	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>			✓	✓
71	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>			✓	✓
72	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
73	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
74	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>				✓
75	Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>				✓
76	Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
77	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>			✓	
78	Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>			✓	✓
79	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>			✓	✓
80	Dartford Warbler	<i>Sylvia undata</i>			✓	
81	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>			✓	✓
82	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
83	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>			✓	
84	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
85	Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
86	Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>			✓	
87	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>			✓	
88	European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
89	European Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>			✓	
90	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>			✓	✓
91	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
92	Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓	✓		✓
93	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>				✓
94	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	✓		✓	✓
95	Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>			✓	✓

	Common name	Scientific name	May			
			21	22	23	24
96	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>			✓	
97	Eurasian Rock Pipit	<i>Anthus petrosus</i>	✓			✓
98	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓		✓	✓
99	European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
100.	Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
101.	European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓
102.	Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>		✓		
103.	Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>				✓

## Mammals

European Hare, *Lepus europaeus*

European Badger, *Meles meles*

Grey Seal, *Halichoerus grypus*

European Roe Deer, *Capreolus capreolus*

Common Pipistrelle, *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*

Soprano Pipistrelle, *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*

European Rabbit, *Oryctolagus cuniculus*

Red Fox, *Vulpes vulpes*

Common Weasel, *Mustela nivalis*

Sika Deer, *Cervus nippon*

Common Noctule, *Nyctalus noctula*

Serotine, *Eptesicus serotinus*

## Reptiles

Smooth Snake, *Coronella austriaca*

Common Lizard, *Zootoca vivipara*

Sand Lizard, *Lacerta agilis*

Wall Lizard, *Podarcis muralis*

## Butterflies

Orange Tip, *Anthocharis cardamines*

Comma, *Polyommata c-album*

Common Blue, *Polyommatus icarus*

Dingy Skipper, *Erynnis tages*

Grizzled Skipper, *Pyrgus malvae*

Small Skipper, *Thymelicus sylvestris*

Small Tortoiseshell, *Aglais urticae*

Wall Brown, *Lasiommata megera*

Green-veined White, *Pieris napi*

Red Admiral, *Vanessa atalanta*

Marsh Fritillary, *Euphydryas aurinia*

Brimstone, *Gonepteryx rhamni*

Holly Blue, *Celastrina argiolus*

Adonis Blue, *Polyommatus bellargus*

Green Hairstreak, *Callophrys rubi*

Large Skipper, *Ochlodes sylvanus*

Peacock, *Inachis io*

Speckled Wood, *Pararge aegeria*

Large White, *Pieris brassicae*

Painted Lady, *Vanessa cardui*

Small Copper, *Lycaena phlaeas*

## Social Media

We're social! Follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and be the first to hear about the launch of new tours, offers and exciting sightings and photos from our recently returned holidays.



[www.facebook.com/naturetrekwildlifeholidays](http://www.facebook.com/naturetrekwildlifeholidays)



[www.twitter.com/naturetrektours](http://www.twitter.com/naturetrektours)



[www.instagram.com/naturetrek\\_wildlife\\_holidays](http://www.instagram.com/naturetrek_wildlife_holidays)