

Themed Birding and Wildlife Walks

We may, from time to time, run a programme of our own guided walks - please contact us if you would like to hear about them, or follow our **Blog Page** where they would be advertised.

The options for themed walks in Dorset are many and varied - these are some examples of the full day/half day walks that we can offer. They will also give you an idea of what could be included on your **Tailor-made Birding and Wildlife Tour**, or as part of your **Dorset Birdwatching Break** package. Most of these walks would also be suitable for our **Guiding for Groups** service.

Depending on the walk, a full day is around 6-8 hours, a half day is around 3-4 hours. In some cases, two half days could be combined to make a full day.

September - October: **Autumn Birds on Ballard & Studland** [full day]

Starting off from South Beach, we'll take a circular walk out over the eastern end of Ballard Down where we'll have a chance of something a little more unusual amongst the passing migrants - it's worth the walk for the views alone! For the remainder of the day we'll make a number of stops along the Studland road to search for waders and wildfowl and keep a look out for any returning wintering divers and grebes out in Studland Bay.

October - February: **Urban Birding in Weymouth** [full day]

Despite its urban environment Weymouth provides some excellent birding. We'll spend the day visiting a number of sites in/around the town taking in a variety of habitats including the sea, reed beds, grazing marsh and woodland. Sites will include Radipole for ducks, gulls and possibly Bittern, Lodmoor for waders, Weymouth Bay/Portland Harbour for grebes and divers and Lorton Meadow/Two-mile Coppice for woodland/scrub birds.

October - February: **Winter birding in Purbeck: to see 100 species** [full day]

A day's bird racing with the aim of seeing/ hearing 100 species during the day. We will meet/end in Wareham and will stay within the Purbeck boundary. The day will be quite intensive as we aim for our target with new birds coming thick and fast to begin with before slowing down as we try to pick off those that have proven more elusive. Our route on the day will depend on a number of variables, such as weather, tides and what birds are about, but may take us Arne, Middlebere, Studland, Durlston and Swineham. We should comfortably pick up 80+ species but 100+ is not impossible.

October - February: **Poole Harbour Circuit – the Birding Hotspots** [full day]

Birding around Poole Harbour we are spoilt for choice of where to go with many hot-spots to choose from. We'll keep on the move dropping in to places of interest to find the variety of species that winter here. Depending on time/tides, sites may include Upton Country Park, Shore Road, Studland, the Hartland Moor-Middlebere-Arne area and Swineham Point [Wareham].

October - February: **In Search of Waders: Poole Harbour's north shore** [half day]

We'll start at Upton Country Park (on the shore of Hole's Bay) before continuing on around to Sandbanks, with stops off at Baiter and Shore Road on the way. Amongst the expected waders (we could see up to 18 species) these sites will give us a good chance of finding Spotted Redshank, Greenshank, Common Sandpiper, Bar-tailed Godwit, Knot and Purple Sandpiper. There should also be a good selection of wildfowl and gulls to add to the days tally.

October - February: **Swineham Walks: River, Pits & Harbour** [half day]

We will take a circular walk around the Swineham area starting out by following the River Frome from Wareham to the gravel pits at Swineham. We'll continue on around into the Piddle Valley before completing the circuit back to Wareham. This walk usually provides a good mixture of birds and there is a good chance of both Hen and Marsh Harriers. The pits hold a selection of duck and can turn up something a little more unusual such Ruddy Duck or Scaup.

November - January: **Maiden Castle & Thornecombe Wood: Farmland & Woodland Birds** [half day]

In the dramatic landscape of one of the UK's top hill-forts we will go in search of farmland birds. The surrounding area often holds large numbers of Golden Plover/Lapwing and is one of the best places to find Corn Bunting (and possibly Grey Partridge). We should and pick up a good mixture of thrushes and finches and Buzzards are always plentiful. We will leave time to visit the nearby Thornecombe Wood where we may be rewarded with Lesser Spotted Woodpecker amongst the woodland birds.

March: **Wareham Forest Early Birds** [half day]

This is often the best month to look for the two heathland specialities. Both Woodlark and Dartford Warbler breed here and this is a good time of the year to catch them in full song. The forest provides some excellent walking and we should pick up a range of other birds that can include Raven, Crossbill and, occasionally, Great Grey Shrike, and we may hear our first chiffchaff of the year.

April - May: **Around Weymouth & Portland** [full day]

From the middle of March, Dorset's first migrants start to appear - early species include Sandwich Tern, Sand Martin, Swallow and Wheatear. Portland is often the first stopping off point on their journey north and we'll spend time around the island looking for them. With increased seabird activity off The Bill there may be a chance of a Puffin or two amongst the auks. Moving off Portland we'll check out the harbour for late ducks, divers and grebes before moving on to Radipole Lake and Lodmoor. This is also a good time to catch up with the elusive Cetti's Warbler, usually heard but less often seen, and Bearded Tit.

April - May: **Puffins & Passage on the Purbeck Coast** [half day]

A few pairs of the colourful Puffin breed on the cliffs at Dancing Ledge. We'll put in some time here to look for them (and for the other auks) coming in to the cliffs before we continue along the coastal path towards Seacombe and Winspit. As well as for local birds, these valleys are great areas to search for newly arrived migrants which are often tucked in amongst the sheltered scrub. Amongst others, Redstart, Ring Ouzel, Whinchat and a selection of warblers are possible.

May - June: **Northern Chalk: Birds & Butterflies of Woods & Downs** [full day]

We will visit a number of sites on the county boundary in the Sixpenny Handley area of north Dorset. In the woodlands the birds are more readily heard than seen so we will have a chance to get to grips with a variety of bird song. Although both Turtle Dove and Nightingale have declined in Dorset over years they are still found in this area along with a good mixture of warblers. As well as the birds we'll concentrate on the butterflies of the chalk grassland and woodland rides where possibilities include a variety of blues, fritillaries and White Admiral.

June - July: **The Dragons & Damsels of Dorset's heathland** [half day]

Some of the UK's best dragonfly watching is to be found on the Dorset heathlands. Old flooded clay workings and ponds on the heaths usually hold a good mixture of "Odos" from the large Emperor and hawkers to a variety of the diminutive damselflies. We will also look out for heathland birds, including Dartford Warbler, and heathland flora.

June - mid.July: **In Search of Nightjars** [half day/evening]

A Dorset experience not to miss is a dusk visit to one of the county's heathlands to listen for (and hopefully see) the enigmatic 'goatsucker'. Our walk will start at 7.00pm to give us time to look for other birds, such as Dartford Warbler, Hobby and Stonechat on Morden Bog, before the Nightjars become active as dusk draws in. We should finish at around 10.00-10.30pm.