BIRDS AND NATURAL HISTORY OF THE NEW FOREST & SURROUNDING AREA
A MID WEEK SHORT BREAK BASED IN HAMPSHIRE, DORSET AND WILTSHIRE

21st to 25th June 2021

TOUR OVERVIEW: The New Forest is an area of outstanding natural beauty. It comprises a mosaic of lowland heath, bog, rough pasture and ancient woodland, which covers 144 square miles of south-west Hampshire. Recently afforded National Park status, the natural history of the New Forest is one of the finest and most interesting in Britain. Nearby the chalk downs of ancient Wessex dominate the landscape, stretching east to west from Gilbert White’s Selbourne to the vast expanse of Salisbury Plain in neighbouring Wiltshire. Coastal Dorset is fringed by the spectacular Purbeck cliffs, which shield the stunning heaths of Arne and Studland and which give way to the sheltered harbours and salt marshes of Poole and Christchurch.

Our tour focuses on this great diversity of habitat, much of it very specialised, which supports some great birding as well as much wider natural history interest. The forests have European Honey-buzzard, Northern Goshawk, Common Redstart, Wood Warbler, Firecrest, Marsh Tit, Common Crossbill and Hawfinch. Heathlands host Dartford Warbler, Eurasian Hobby, Woodlark, Tree Pipit, Common Stonechat and European Nightjar, whilst chalk grasslands and downs offer the possibility of Stone Curlew, Montagu’s Harrier, Common Quail, European Turtle-dove, Whinchat and Grasshopper Warbler. Salisbury Plain is home to the Great Bustard re-introduction scheme. Formerly widely distributed in England, the Great Bustard became extinct here in the 1840’s due to collectors and changes in agricultural practice. Following an extensive feasibility study, birds have been reintroduced annually since 2004, initially from Russia and more recently from Spain. Progress has been encouraging and we will visit this worthwhile project to see the birds, which are free-flying, at close quarters.
All three species of snake and all three species of lizard that occur in Britain are found within the area and we will make a special effort to see these secretive and localised creatures. Several species of butterfly, dragonfly and damselfly, which are absent or scarce elsewhere in Britain add interest, whilst botanists will find the sandy lowland heaths provide a host of unusual species to occupy their days.

**TOUR DESCRIPTION:** Our relaxed five-day mid-week break is based in a comfortable hotel in the New Forest, from where we radiate out each day to explore the forest, chalk downs and coastal heaths of this picturesque part of southern England. To allow plenty of time to reach the hotel, we will meet there mid to late afternoon on Monday and conclude by lunchtime on Friday. Leisurely walks and picnics will be undertaken as we seek out the special flora and fauna of the region, arriving back each day in time to relax on the garden terrace of our hotel, no doubt with a nice drink in hand, before our evening meal.

**PHOTOGRAPHIC OPPORTUNITIES:** We will allow plenty of time to secure good views of the birds and other wildlife, so photographers should enjoy a rich feast of frame filling opportunities.

**BIRD & WILDLIFE LISTS:** Bird highlights are likely to include Common Buzzard, European Honey-buzzard, Northern Goshawk, Montagu’s Harrier, Eurasian Hobby, Red Kite, Green, Greater Spotted & Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers (though the latter is extremely elusive at the time of our visit), Stone Curlew, Little Ringed Plover, Woodcock, European Turtle-dove, Common Quail, European Nightjar, Woodlark, Tree Pipit, Rock Pipit, Common Redstart, Spotted Flycatcher, Whinchat, Common Stonechat, Wood Warbler, Dartford Warbler, Garden Warbler, Firecrest, Marsh Tit, Hawfinch, Common Crossbill, Corn Bunting.
Reptiles include Adder, (Barred) Grass Snake, Smooth Snake, Common Lizard, Sand Lizard and Slow Worm with Natterjack Toad providing amphibian interest. More information on the recent ‘splitting’ of grass snakes in Europe will be given during the tour.

Dragonflies include Broad-bodied Chaser, Golden-ringed, Downy Emerald, Emperor, Black-tailed Skimmer, Keeled Skimmer and Four-spotted Chaser. Damselflies include Small Red, Southern Hawker, Scarce Blue-tailed, Beautiful Demoiselle, Red-eyed Damselfly, White-legged Damselfly.

Butterflies include: Silver-studded Blue, White Admiral, Marbled White, Silver-washed Fritillary, Dark Green Fritillary, Small Skipper, Large Skipper and Purple Hairstreak as well as the commoner species.

Please be aware that the flight periods of the butterflies, dragonflies and damselflies vary from year to year depending upon the spring weather. The species in the lists above (including the birds) are all ‘potentials’ and as ever with nature we cannot guarantee sightings of each species mentioned. Our tour dates are designed to see a good cross section of the wildlife and come at the end and beginning of some species flight periods, but with some luck, patience and the weather on our side we have good chances to see the majority.
EASE AND PACE: Leisurely throughout and basic fitness is all that is required. We will enjoy short walks of up to one kilometre at the various locations we visit. The maximum road journey is of one and a half hours only. No early starts are necessary and we should be back at our accommodation by 5:30 pm each day. On one evening we will try for European Nightjar and Woodcock close to our hotel, setting off after dinner.

WEATHER: Being England in early summer, we should anticipate a certain degree of unpredictability with the weather. All being well it should be pleasantly warm and if the sun shines, temperatures could easily rise to 20 degrees or more in the afternoon. Equally we must be prepared for showery and cool days too, when we must stoically make the best of it, though there are some nature reserves in the area with hides and visitor centres which afford shelter and a respite from inclement weather.

ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD: We spend all five days at a very comfortable hotel on the outskirts of Burley in the New Forest. Full board accommodation is provided, commencing with dinner on Monday 21st June and ending with breakfast on Friday 25th June. Daytime meals will be packed lunches supplemented by the occasional cafe stop to sample a cream tea or similar delight. En-suite rooms are twin or double bedded. Single rooms are available.
**PRICE:** The price is £1095 per person to include full-board accommodation, bed & breakfast and dinner taken at our hotel and a light lunch taken as a cafe snack or as a packed lunch. Not included are your drinks during the day and drinks accompanying your evening meals. The single room supplement is to be £125. To book your place on the trip please complete and send us a booking form together with a deposit of £250 per person.

**GROUP SIZE:** The tour will proceed with five group members plus a Birding Abroad leader. Maximum group size 10 plus two leaders.
OUTLINE ITINERARY:

Monday 21st June - the tour commences as we convene at our hotel in Burley. Your Birding Abroad leaders will meet the group at 15:00 in the hotel lounge, where we will have welcome drinks and a briefing about the tour, followed by a short excursion and later our first evening meal. Check-in commences at 14.00 for those who wish to arrive earlier and have a short walk around the hotel grounds or take a stroll into the nearby picturesque village of Burley. For those travelling by train, pick-ups can be arranged at Bournemouth train station for transfer to the hotel. Depending on numbers, and any coronavirus restrictions applicable at the time, transport from the Doncaster area will hopefully become possible too.

Tuesday 22nd June - a full day exploring the New Forest, visiting several key locations including Acres Down near Lyndhurst and Crockford Stream on the southern edge of Beaulieu Heath, where with luck and patience, we hope to see a variety of our target species.

Wednesday 23rd June - a full day exploring the chalk downs and mature woodlands of south-east Wiltshire with the ancient town of Salisbury at their heart. We visit the rolling grasslands at the edge of Salisbury Plain, take a stroll on Martin Down and pay a visit to the Great Bustard Group reintroduction project.

Thursday 24th June - a full day exploring a section of the Isle of Purbeck, not strictly an island of course, but a peninsula in coastal Dorset. In the morning we visit Durlston Head which towers above Swanage, followed by Studland, a picturesque strip of sandy heath below Corfe Castle. We then cross Poole Harbour entrance on the quaint chain ferry to visit the Christchurch Harbour area before returning to our hotel.
**Friday 25th June** - we have until early afternoon to visit localities within easy reach of our hotel in the New Forest. The tour concludes at 13.00 at the hotel. A packed lunch is provided on the last day, though you may wish to save this for your journey home and have a light lunch at the hotel before we say our farewells. Transport can then be provided for those wishing to travel to Bournemouth railway station for the journey home.
Please note that the itinerary is flexible and may change slightly to suit the prevailing weather conditions and to abide with any restrictions in place with respect to Covid-19 at the time of our tour. Each day and each part of the day is therefore interchangeable. We will also rely on the knowledge of our local guides who may recommend subtle changes to our plans to increase our enjoyment and success rate at the places we visit. On one evening, the driest and calmest, we will spend an hour or so watching and listening for European Nightjars.

Sand Lizard, one of the UK’s rarest reptiles and a major highlight of the tour

Other dates may be available for this tour, so please contact us to explore this option.

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For booking form please see the Booking Page on www.birdingabroad.com

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