

Spring migration in the Garden of England and Sussex

Kent and East Sussex are situated in the south-east of England and hold several interesting areas for birds in the form of reserves and protected areas. Our tour takes in the very best of this unique area from the wetlands of the Swale Estuary and Isle of Sheppey and then on to the bird-rich sites of Stodmarsh and Sandwich Bay and the migration hot-spot of Dungeness. The tour concludes in East Sussex, a predominantly rural county with areas of interest being at Rye Harbour, Cuckmere Valley and Ashdown Forest.

■ Please note you should arrive at Faversham by 1400 hours on April 23rd 2022 or April 22nd 2023 Faversham is well served by the fast railway network from London and the motorway system.

Day 1: After arriving at our base in Faversham we make the short journey to Oare Marshes run by the Kent Wildlife Trust. The reserve is adjacent to the Swale Estuary and a footpath traverses the habitats of shallow lagoons, reedbeds and muddy shore. Common, Sandwich and Little Terns regularly feed in the estuary. On the scrapes we should find Pied Avocet and migrant waders, notably Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwits, Common Greenshank, Ruff and perhaps rarer species such as Wood Sandpiper and Little Stint. Within the reedbeds Eurasian Reed and Sedge Warblers should be in full song with Western Marsh Harriers quartering the area. Return to our base in Faversham for the next three nights.

Day 2: Today we head north across the Swale Bridge and onto the Isle of Sheppey, which retains large expanses of the North Kent Marshes. Our first reserve is at Elmley which is reached along tracks passing through farmland, much of which is managed for wildlife. Along the track we should encounter displaying Northern Lapwing, Eurasian Curlew and, if there are any seasonal pools lingering, wildfowl. A walk down towards the reserve can be productive for Little Owl and occasionally Short-eared Owl, Northern Wheatear, Pied and Western Yellow Wagtails, European Stonechat and Meadow Pipit. The scrapes at Elmley hold significant numbers of waders which should include migratory Grey

Dates

TOUR A: Saturday April 23rd – Friday April 29th 2022

TOUR B: Saturday April 22nd – Friday April 28th 2023

Leader: Phil Beraet

Group Size: 7

Birds: 130–160

and European Golden Plovers, Spotted Redshank and Green and Common Sandpipers, while at this time of the year there is always the chance of a rarer species such as Curlew Sandpiper or Temminck's Stint. After leaving Elmley we travel along the Harty Ferry road, which is probably one of the best sites for raptors in south-east England. Careful scanning may reveal Western Marsh and Hen Harriers, Peregrine Falcon, Eurasian Sparrowhawk and Merlin. Patches of trees attract remnant populations of Corn Bunting, Eurasian Linnet and other farmland species.

Day 3: This morning we head to Sandwich Bay and its bird observatory. Like all migration spots it is hard to predict what may appear, but recent years late April has witnessed good passage numbers of Common Swift, Common and Lesser Whitethroats, Garden Warbler, Blackcap, Common Cuckoo and Mediterranean Gull. Nearby Worth Marshes is a reliable spot for Little



Bearded Reedling Photo: David Bonniface

Ringed Plover and migrant Garganey. In the afternoon we head towards the Stour Valley and Stodmarsh National Nature Reserve. An area at the eastern end often attracts waders in springtime. We have a good chance of locating Eurasian Bittern, Water Rail, Western Marsh Harrier, Eurasian Hobby, and in the reedbeds Bearded Reedling, Cetti's, Sedge and Eurasian Reed Warblers. A section of woodland and scrub can be productive for the declining European Turtle Dove and Common Nightingale plus other woodland species.

Day 4: Dungeness is our destination today. It is the largest shingle spit in Europe, jutting into the English Channel, and has its own bird observatory and adjacent RSPB reserve. At this time of the year expect to see a wide range of birds including many migrants from further south in Europe. A scan of the power station may reveal Black

Redstarts which breed in the vicinity. Offshore seabirds can be numerous in suitable wind conditions and should include Manx Shearwater, Brent Goose, Sandwich, Common and Arctic Terns, and Great, Arctic and occasionally Pomarine Skuas. Migrant passerines use the bushes and scrub and we may find Ring Ouzel, Goldcrest, Firecrest and migrant warblers. The nearby RSPB reserve has hides overlooking scrapes and lagoons where we could see Little and Great Egrets, Garganey, Little and Black Terns, Mediterranean and Little Gulls, and Common Ringed and Little Ringed Plovers. A walk around the trails may produce migrants including Common Redstart, Common Whitethroat, Tree Pipit and other passerines. Rarities turn up on a regular basis and have included Common Crane and Black-winged Stilt. Dengemarsh is often worth visiting with recent records of Purple Heron and Western Cattle Egret. Scotney Pit often has Black-necked Grebe



Little Egret Photo: Simon Papps

in spring, plus egrets and wildfowl. Further along the road there is a possibility of Common Scoter in inshore waters. Transfer to Rye in East Sussex via the coast road for three nights.

Day 5: We start our day by visiting Rye Harbour National Nature Reserve, a compact area of shingle adjacent to the River Rother. Similar birds occur to those at Dungeness although there is a large colony of terns which sometimes attracts Roseate Tern on passage. Later in the morning we travel to Cuckmere and the Seven Sisters Country Park. This is an interesting area in spring for migrants with recent records of Eurasian Spoonbill, Black Kite, Kentish Plover and Water Pipit.

Day 6: Our final destination is the Ashdown Forest, which has a wide variety of birdlife in spring. Patches of heath attract Woodlark, Common Stonechat, Dartford Warbler, Tree Pipit and Eurasian Hobby. On the forest edge we may find Yellowhammer, Common Reed Bunting, Common Redstart, Lesser Whitethroat, Willow Warbler,

Spotted Flycatcher and small numbers of European Turtle Dove. *Later in the day we return to Faversham where the tour concludes.

* It is possible to drop clients off at East Grinstead, which has good connections to London.

Prices

Tour Price: £1495
Tour Price B: £1595
Single room: £ No Charge
Deposit: £150

This holiday is fully inclusive of accommodation, meals, complimentary transport and guidance.

Not included: insurance and items of a personal nature. Entry to RSPB reserves if you are a non-member.