

Cathedrals and Birds, Southern England

July 1-12, 2023

Day 1: July 1 (Saturday) London Arrival

Most flights arrive in London in the morning after an overnight flight. We will transfer to our nearby hotel and rest for a few hours. In the afternoon we will take an optional excursion to some local birding areas near the airport where we could see Red Kite, Ring-necked Parakeet as well as other birds such as European Blackbird, Common Wood-Pigeon, European Starling and Eurasian Collared-Dove.

At dinner we will go over our plans for the next 10 days. Overnight at Heathrow Airport hotel

Day 2: July 2 (Sunday) Windsor Castle and Great Park

We will start birding this morning west of London at part of the London reservoir system and can attract excellent birds year-round. The typical selection of summer species include: Mute Swan, Canada and Egyptian Geese, Tufted Duck, Little and Great Crested Grebe and Black-headed Gull. Once we have had our fill of waterbirds we will continue onto Windsor Great Park. This 5000 acre estate is a beautiful blend of landscape and natural habitats. The star bird here has to be the gaudy Mandarin Duck which has a large feral population in southern England. We could also see Green and Great Spotted Woodpecker, Eurasian Nuthatch, Eurasian Treecreeper and more. The afternoon will be spent at nearby Windsor Castle, the oldest inhabited castle in the world. We will enjoy a tour enjoying the finery, artwork and history of this beautiful castle, originally built in the 11th Century. We will then continue west towards the beautiful city of Salisbury. Overnight in Amesbury

Day 3: July 3 (Monday) Great Bustards and Stonehenge

The Great Bustard is a large, turkey-like bird found throughout Europe and Asia. They have been extinct as a breeding species in the UK for the last 100 years. We will visit the open country of Salisbury Plain where the Great Bustard reintroduction program has been taking place since 1998. The population is now over 100 birds, with successful breeding now occurring every year. While in the same area we will switch gears and go back even further to visit the ancient site of Stonehenge. Steeped in mystery, it is believed that this ancient site dates back over 4,000 years. A good history of the site is at: <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/stonehenge/history-and-stories/history/> Overnight in Amesbury

Day 4: July 4 (Tuesday) Langford Lakes and Salisbury Cathedral

Nestled in the Wylde Valley between Salisbury and Warminster, the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust's Langford Lakes Nature Reserve will be our destination this morning. This old gravel pit from the 1930's is now a destination for local birders. We will walk the easy trails and look for Common Kingfisher, Gray Heron, Great Crested Grebe and breeding waterfowl. The afternoon will be a change of pace as we will visit one of England's finest cathedrals-Salisbury. The spire, Britain's tallest, rises 123m above the ground and weighs over 6,000 tons. Built in the early 1300's and home to one of the only 4 remaining copies of the Magna Carta- the inspiration for the American Constitution. Overnight in Amesbury

Day 5: July 5 (Wednesday) Ham Wall and Wells

Today we will continue west into the County of Somerset. This county is rural with rolling hills, some popular seaside resorts and several ancient historic towns, such as Bath and Wells. Our first stop will be at the RSPB's

Ham Wall National Nature Preserve in the shadow of Glastonbury Tor. Originally owned by the peat industry, this is now a thriving wetland with Eurasian and Little Bittern, Great Egret, Common Kingfisher and Eurasian Hobby all breeding in the area. We will spend the morning here before driving the short distance to Wells. This small city is steeped in history and crowned by the beautiful Wells Cathedral. One of our favorites, this cathedral was finished in 1239 and is in the Gothic style, imported from France around the end of the 12th Century. We will spend the afternoon around the cathedral before heading to our nearby accommodation. Overnight in Wells

Day 6: July 6 (Thursday) Chew Valley Lake and Bath

Our morning birding will be at Chew Valley Lake. Owned and operated by Bristol Water, this lake is popular with birders and birds and some great sightings have occurred over the years. We will walk some of the trails looking for Cetti's Warbler, Blackcap, Common Whitethroat as well as any wetland species. After a picnic lunch (depending on the weather), we will drive to the historic and beautiful city of Bath, where we will have a free afternoon. It's then back to Wells where we will again spend the night. Overnight in Wells

Day 7: July 7 (Friday) Sherborne and Winchester

After breakfast we will drive south to Sherborne Castle in rural Dorset. Built in 1574 by St Walter Raleigh, this beautiful property was designed by the renowned landscaper, Lancelot "Capability" Brown. Arguably one of England's finest garden designers, the 42 acres of beautiful gardens surround a lake, with champion trees and views over 100 acres of parkland. We will explore both the house and gardens before beginning our drive back east through the New Forest. Hardly "new", this forest was founded in 1079 as the hunting grounds of William the Conqueror. We will make a couple of stops before heading to the lovely city of Winchester. Overnight in Winchester

Day 8: July 8 (Saturday) Magdalen Hill and Winchester

From our hotel outside the city, we will take a morning walk through Magdalen Hill Down. This part of the chalk grasslands is now a Butterfly Conservation reserve famous for Marbled White, Chalkhill and Adonis Blues and other butterflies. Birds are typical of open country and include Blue, Great and Long-tailed Tits, Yellowhammer and Eurasian Sparrowhawk. We will spend the afternoon in Winchester where we will visit Winchester's fine cathedral. Built from 1079-1532, this cathedral was built in the perpendicular Gothic style and is the longest Mediaeval cathedral in the world. The rest of the afternoon is free to explore this beautiful city. Overnight in Winchester

Day 9: July 9 (Sunday) Farlington Marshes and Arundel

We continue our slow trek eastwards with a walk at the Hampshire and Isle of Wight's Farlington Marshes Nature Reserve. This coastal refuge near Portsmouth is home to thousands of waterfowl in the winter months, with many remaining to breed in the local area. Common Shelduck are obvious, along with Northern Lapwing, Eurasian Oystercatcher and Black-tailed Godwit. The afternoon will be at nearby Arundel Castle. While some of the house was rebuilt in the 1800's, much of the original castle remains. The grounds are a riot of color in the summer months and we can wander before heading towards the town of Pulborough where we will spend the night. Overnight near Pulborough

Day 10: July 10 (Monday) Pulborough and Petworth

This morning will be at another RSPB Reserve, Pulborough Brooks is on the edge of the South Downs in this lovely part of the country. A wide range of habitats occur on the preserve with some of the most obvious birds being Eurasian Green Woodpecker, Eurasian Magpie, European Robin and Common Buzzard. It is easy walking and we can always stop for tea at the RSPB café. The National Trust's Petworth House is nearby with its magnificent 700 acre grounds and one of the finest art collections owned by the Trust. The grounds were also designed by "Capability" Brown and feature a serpentine path, formal gardens and woodlands. Of course we will do a little birding along the way. Overnight near Pulborough

Day 11: July 11 (Tuesday)

Knepp Estate

One of the most evocative places in the south is the Knepp Estate. Made famous by Isabella Tree's book "Wilding", this 3,500 acre property was a working farm and has now been a study in re-wilding part of the British countryside. Large acreages have been turned back to nature and several high profile reintroduction projects have taken wing, such as White Stork and European Beaver. We will walk some of the estate's trail before having lunch in a local pub. After that we head towards Heathrow Airport where we once again spend the night. Overnight near Heathrow

Day 12: July 12 (Wednesday)

Departure for home

After exploring part of Southern England's rich history and wildlife, we leave for home in the morning.