

Alderney – Wildlife & History in Style

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

- Day 1** Fly Alderney and transfer to hotel
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- Day 2/4** Daily programme of natural history walks and excursions around Alderney
-
- Day 5** Fly Southampton
-

Departs

April, May and June

Focus

Birds and other Natural History

Grading

Grade A/B

Dates and prices

see website (tour code GBR49)

Highlights

- An ideal holiday for the keen all-round naturalist.
- Enjoy spectacular Gannet and Puffin colonies.
- Stay at the island's premier hotel.
- Bird-ringing demonstration at the islands Bird Observatory
- Learn about the islands history visiting fascinating historical sites.
- Butterflies, Moths and Flowers in abundance.
- Bat-detecting and 'Blonde' Hedgehogs.
- Resident birds including Peregrine, Raven and Dartford Warbler and the chance to enjoy migration



Images from top: Braye Beach Hotel, 'Blonde' Hedgehog and Gannet colony



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NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Introduction

This is a 4-night/5-day holiday of wildlife walks and history on the charming island of Alderney, based at the 4-star Braye Beach Hotel (B&B basis), the best hotel on the island.

Alderney is the most northerly of the Channel Islands and, despite lying just eight miles off Normandy's Cotentin Peninsula, it is strangely the least accessible. No scheduled ferry service links the island with either the mainland of France or England, or with any other island, and herein lies its charm – it being a peaceful backwater where the pace of life is slow, visitors are sparse and the locals most welcoming.

Just over three-and-a-half miles long and a mile-and-a-half wide, it is possible to walk around Alderney in a day. However, for the naturalist, the island's rich tapestry of habitats is deserving of much more time. In spring, given favourable weather, migrant birds (perhaps including a rarity or two!) will be encountered whilst moths, butterflies and fine displays of flora enrich the island's natural history.



Gannet Colony

On this holiday we will explore Alderney on foot, supported, when required, by the local island minibus. Our leisurely walks will each cover 2-3 miles and will enable us to explore the island's patchwork of grazing pastures, wooded valleys, flower-filled grasslands and dunes, small ponds, marshes and heaths, often from cliff-top paths accessing spectacular coastal scenery. From the latter we should see Peregrines, Buzzards, Ravens and seabirds, including the spectacular Gannet colonies on Les Etacs and Ortac (between them hosting over 8,000 pairs – 2% of the world's population). If the

weather is good, an optional boat trip out to enjoy at least one of these colonies – as well as other seabirds and marine-life – will be a highlight of this holiday. In addition, we will visit the recently established Alderney Bird Observatory for a ringing demonstration and the warden will explain the importance of Alderney's geographical position on the migration highway. Using local experts we will also offer you the chance to enjoy moth-trapping, bat-detecting and sightings of some of Alderney's thriving population of Hedgehogs, many of which are leucistic (or 'Blonde' Hedgehogs).

Additionally on this holiday, which will be escorted by a local expert as well as all-round naturalist, our focus will extend to cover some of the remarkable history of Alderney. Indeed, as we walk around the island, it is impossible not to be struck by its wealth of monuments from the past, whether it be the Roman fort at Longis Bay, the thirteenth century Bonne Terre Watermill, the commanding stone harbour and forts of the Victorians, or the extraordinary concrete defences and bunkers built by the Germans during their occupation of Alderney between 1940 and 1945.

To reach Alderney one must either fly via Guernsey or take the direct scheduled service from Southampton airport aboard a 14-seat Trislander or 18-seat Dornier 228 – a flight that offers fabulous views over the south coast’s expansive estuaries, the New Forest and the Isle of Wight if the weather is clear (the cost of which is included in the price of this holiday). Once there, we will be based in the splendid Braye Beach Hotel, a sparkling 4-star hotel commanding fabulous views over the bay and its idyllic white sandy beach. For those wishing for a little time off from our programme, the hotel’s bar, terrace and superior rooms offer perfect spots in which to relax and absorb the views!

Day 1

Fly Alderney

Unlike the other Channel Islands, Alderney cannot be reached by means of a scheduled ferry service, either from UK or France or from the other islands. Herein lies much of its charm, since the island remains quiet and undeveloped. It is most easily accessed using Aurigny’s scheduled flights from Southampton Airport each day. For



Corblets Bay

this itinerary, we plan to fly you on a lunchtime flight to Alderney, subject to availability. The flight is a short one, just 40 minutes, and when the weather is clear it can afford wonderful views over the South Downs, New Forest, Hampshire ports and estuaries, the Solent, the Isle of Wight (including the Needles) and the Dorset coast.

On arrival at Alderney’s quaint and tiny airport, you will be met by your tour leader, Martin Batt and a local naturalist. From here a mini-coach will transfer you to the Braye Beach Hotel just a mile away. Once there, after you have settled into your rooms, they

will introduce you to Alderney and the programme for the rest of the afternoon over a sandwich or drink on the hotel terrace.

It is likely that they will then take you on a stroll through the Giffoine, the largest area of heathland on Alderney, this afternoon. This lies at the western end of the island and is home to resident Dartford Warblers, Stonechats, Peregrines and Ravens. It also provides wonderful views of the Gannet colony (12,000 birds) on the islets of Les Etacs, just off-shore, that is occupied and busy right up until November when both young and adult birds depart for a winter at sea. Razorbills, Guillemots, Shags, Fulmars and Herring Gulls also breed here and should be visible.

The Giffoine, like so many of the island’s headlands, is also a good place for migrant birds at this time of year, amongst them Wheatears, Whinchats, redstarts, pipits and warblers. Spring butterflies will be on the wing from April with a chance of seeing the Large Tortoiseshell which emerges from hibernation in the dark recesses of the forts and bunkers whilst by May Glanville Fritillaries, Wall Brown (which is still common here, unlike on the mainland) and Green Hairstreaks should be on the wing.

Dinners are not included in the cost of this holiday, to allow you a little independence should you wish, and the chance to sample some of the island’s excellent restaurants. The Braye Beach Hotel itself offers an excellent menu and choice for those not wishing to venture out, though the service and wholesome dinners served in the less

formal ‘The First and Last’ restaurant or the ‘Cantina No. 6’ tapas restaurant are close by and both thoroughly recommended. For those with the energy to walk uphill for 20 minutes into the pretty little town of St. Anne (no more than a large village), the Georgian House is amongst several good restaurants.

Day 2

Excursions from Braye Beach Hotel

After breakfast we will drive to Longis Bay, site of the Roman fort known locally as ‘the Nunnery’. This is the location of the recently established Alderney Bird Observatory which since its opening in March 2016 has proved a great success, providing valuable information on the routes taken by migrant birds travelling between Europe and Africa. Indeed, the number of birds ringed here in the first six months surpassed that of any other UK bird observatory. Here we will be treated to a bird-ringing demonstration from the warden which is sure to be one of the highlights of the tour.

In Longis Bay we will scan for resident Shelducks and such waders as Oystercatcher, Curlew, Whimbrel and Greenshank in the bay before commencing the circular trail around the Longis Nature Reserve which lies at the eastern end of the island and is particularly good for migrant birds. The walk is 3 miles in length, and will take the morning going slowly, but it can be shortened if there are members in our party preferring an alternative shorter route.



Glanville Fritillary

First, we will explore Longis Common, an area of scrub and open ground favoured by Wheatears, Whinchats, warblers and pipits on migration. Then we’ll focus on the Mannez Ponds, the Longis bird hide enabling us to get good views of large collections of hirundines, ‘reed’ warblers, waterfowl, resident Little Grebes and perhaps a Water Rail. The wetlands here are also perfect for dragonflies: all resident species on the island can be found here, including Red-veined Darter, as well as migrant and vagrant species.

Our walk will also take us through the Mannez-Garenne heathlands, where Dartford Warblers may sometimes be seen, as well as such birds of prey as Hobby, Peregrine, Kestrel and Sparrowhawk. It’s an area good for wild flowers with Green-winged Orchids on the short grass of the heathland in April. As we follow the coastal path to complete our circuit we will see carpets of pink-flowered Thrift, Prostrate Broom and Bluebells. From here it is also sometimes possible to see a pod of Bottlenose Dolphins feeding amongst the turbulent waters generated by very strong intertidal currents. Such is the mix of habitats in this small area that it is inevitably one of the best places for avian variety and the chance of a rarity or two!

On completing our walk, the pleasant ‘Old Barn Restaurant’ at Longis Bay makes the perfect spot for a break, refreshments and a light lunch. There will also be another opportunity to view ‘the Nunnery’. This was originally a Roman coastal fort of the 3rd-4th Century AD and is one of the most historically important buildings in the Channel Islands. It was probably built as a signal station; alterations were then made in the 15th and 16th centuries, and in the 1790s a barracks was added before German WW2 defences were additionally built into the structure!

If the weather is at its best this afternoon, we will take a boat trip out to the off-shore islands to look for seabirds and other marine-life. Alderney's 'West Coast and Burhou Island Ramsar Site' protects a coastline, waters, islands and islets that support many seabirds; this is also an extremely spectacular coastline best viewed by boat. First, we'll head to Burhou Island Bird Sanctuary, less than a mile off-shore. Burhou supports the largest population of Puffins to be found in the English Channel, and the only colony of Storm Petrels. We will see Puffins gathered in rafts on the water as we approach the island and watch as they fly back and forth to their nesting burrows. At this season, we will also see Razorbills, Guillemots and Fulmars which breed in small colonies on islets around the western end of Alderney. On the large islets of Les Etacs and Ortac, Alderney's two large breeding colonies of Gannets (jointly hosting 8,000 pairs) will be busy and active. We'll take the boat as close as we can to at least one of these bustling colonies and enjoy being amongst these elegant and enterprising birds. Shags will also be on their breeding cliffs, as indeed are resident Peregrines. Bottlenose and Common Dolphins, and Atlantic Grey Seals, may also occasionally be seen.



Longis Bay

Please note that this trip is tide and weather dependent. It is therefore possible that a prolonged spell of bad weather could rule it out during our stay. For this reason its cost, around £25 per person, is not included in the cost of our holiday and must be paid directly to the skipper working for the Alderney Wildlife Trust. Conversely, if the weather is very good, it is possible both to see the offshore islands as well as to circumnavigate Alderney itself. Please also note that we will assess the weather forecast and aim to do this boat trip at the very best time, rescheduling the tour itinerary accordingly.

If the sun is shining, a drink on the hotel terrace or in the glass-fronted bar, both overlooking the long white sandy beach of Braye Bay and its pretty harbour, is the perfect way to complete the day.

Again if the weather is suitable, on one or two evenings those that are interested may choose to go out with a local expert in search of bats, using a bat-detector, and in search of Alderney's thriving population of Hedgehogs, many of which are leucistic (or 'Blonde' Hedgehogs).

Day 3

Excursions from Braye Beach Hotel

Optional pre-breakfast early morning birding walks (between 7am and 8am) will be offered on some mornings should any group members be interested, and these are most likely to focus on one of Alderney's wooded valleys, the Giffoine or Longis Common. Generally though, each day will start at 9am, after breakfast, often with a look at one of the moth traps run by David Wedd, the island's expert lepidopterist. We can expect to see good numbers of interesting moths, some of which will be extremely scarce or absent from the rest of the UK.

However, our primary activity this morning will be a walk from St. Anne, down to, and then along, the spectacular coastline of the south-west of the island – another circular stroll of 3 miles or so. The scenery from these south

cliffs is breath-taking, France's Cotentin Peninsula and the distant Channel Islands of Sark, Brecqhou, Herm and Guernsey to be seen on the horizon. In the cliff-top fields, hedgerows and heaths, and in the sheltered little wooded valleys through which the footpath passes, we'll look for passing migrant birds, wayside flora and butterflies. Such rarities as Prostrate Broom and the spikes of Greater Broomrape may be found here. We'll also look to sea for seabirds and cetaceans, and overhead for Ravens, Buzzards, Peregrines and perhaps a passing Marsh Harrier. The fields and heaths around Telegraph Bay and Vallée des Trois Vaux, and the Giffoine where we'll end our walk, have particular potential. From them, we shall also be able to enjoy again the site of Les Etacs and their 12,000 Gannets.



Fort Clonque

Back in St. Anne, we might take a light lunch and refreshments in the Georgian House or a similar pub, or we might return to our hotel and enjoy a break on the bay-side terrace! For those that wish, there will always be the opportunity to take an afternoon (or even a morning) off, either to relax at the hotel or to explore St. Anne at leisure. The latter has a small but fascinating museum which documents particularly well the history of the island during WW2, which is such a unique aspect of the island's history as evidenced by the numerous bunkers and other fortifications still present around the island.

For those keen for further afternoon activity, we'll head back to the region of Longis Common and Longis Bay, where the ponds, heath, scrub and bay itself are likely to attract a changing number and variety of migrant birds each day, as well as dragonflies and butterflies. The Old Barn restaurant and garden always provide a welcome break in this area of the island, though the prospect of concluding the day again on the hotel terrace is always a tempting one!

Day 4

Excursions from Braye Beach Hotel

This morning we will walk from the hotel along Crabby Bay and the beach of Platte Saline, the only beaches on the island still holding breeding Ringed Plovers as well as being of interest to the botanist on account of their shore-line flora which includes Sea Rocket, Sea Kale, Yellow-horned Poppy and Sea Holly.. We'll then pass the imposing Fort Tourgis, built by the Victorians, along with Braye Harbour's breakwater and many other fortifications, as a defence against the French in the mid-19th century. Nature has reclaimed much of the forts' surroundings and here in late spring and summer we may find the beautiful spikes of Bee and Pyramidal Orchids. As so often on Alderney, built alongside such Victorian (or even Roman) fortifications are German bunkers and artillery positions.

We next walk a stretch of coastline beneath scrub-covered cliffs that not only has potential for sheltering migrant birds, especially warblers and flycatchers, but also offers fine views out to the Burhou Island. Indeed we are now within the 'West Coast and Burhou Island Ramsar Site' and able to enjoy fine coastal scenery that includes the distant white pinnacle of Ortac, an offshore stack hosting a colony of 4,000 Gannets. The bay here, Clonque Bay, is the largest intertidal area on Alderney, its fabulous rock pools, which are exposed and accessible at low tide, hosting 160 species of seaweed and a wealth of other fascinating shore creatures, including the Ormer, a prized shellfish.

Another spectacular Victorian fortress, Fort Clonque, sits on a headland looking out onto the Gannet colony of Les Etacs. From here, we'll take the 'Zig-zag' path up the cliffs to the heathland of the Giffoine and back to St. Anne for our lunch break.



Peregrine Falcon

This afternoon will offer our final opportunity for a boat trip, should the weather not have been favourable to this point. However, if we've already successfully cruised the islands as planned, we'll take final looks at the Longis Nature Reserve, or perhaps a stroll from the airport through Rose Farm and the adjacent Bon Terre woodland to its thirteenth century watermill, which is currently being restored by volunteers.

This evening will be our final chance to enjoy the delights of the wonderful Braye Beach Hotel, so, for those that wish, we may dine together in the hotel restaurant.

Day 5

Fly Southampton

It is anticipated that the majority of the group will depart Alderney on the midday flight to Southampton airport at 1205 hours (arriving there at 1245), and this is when our tour will officially end. This will enable us to enjoy a final breakfast at the Braye Beach Hotel, then take a last – optional – natural history walk, from 9am to 11am, perhaps exploring the coastal heath and wooded valley around Essex Castle before heading up to the airport for an 11.30am check-in.

Tour grading

Grade A/B. Being a small island, with a lesser need for transport, Alderney is ideal for the walker. Whilst we will use a local mini-coach, or other vehicles, to transport us from and to the airport, and to ferry us to some of the starting points of our walks, and back again, most of this holiday will be enjoyed on foot. Generally we will aim to do a walk of about 3 miles, at a slow birding/botanisising pace, between 9am and lunchtime each day (though on some of these there is an option to take a shorter route). After a leisurely lunch-break, a more gentle birding/natural history stroll will be offered each afternoon between 2pm and 5pm approximately. All excursions are optional and, due to the small size of the island, some flexibility can be accommodated on occasions and within reason.

Weather

Alderney's weather is similar to that expected in southern England or northern France. It could be dry, warm and sunny with daytime temperatures in excess of 20°C ... or wet, windy and cool. Or both! Generally, being

surrounded by sea, Alderney's summers are a little cooler than those on the nearby mainland, whilst its winters are warmer, with frosts almost unknown.

Food and accommodation

We use the 4-star Braye Beach Hotel, by far the best hotel on Alderney. Recently renovated, and decorated and furnished to the highest of modern standards, the hotel overlooks the long white sandy beach of Braye Bay and the colourful Braye Harbour. Half of the hotel's rooms overlook the bay and greet the rising sun; the others overlook a quiet street at the back of the hotel. All rooms are en-suite and equipped to a high spec, but the bay-view rooms are particularly recommended (though they come at a supplement of £30pp for the 4-night stay). The restaurant, bar and terrace of the hotel all overlook Braye Bay.



Room at Braye Beach Hotel

Bed and breakfast only is included in the cost of this holiday. The cost of lunches and dinners is not included since each day's itinerary is planned to enable group members to take a break either at the Braye Beach Hotel, or at one of Alderney's many pubs or restaurants where a choice of lunch, snacks and drinks will be available to suit individual preferences. Dinners are not included in the cost of this holiday in order to allow you a little independence, as well as the chance to

explore and sample some of the island's excellent restaurants, should you wish to. The Braye Beach Hotel itself offers an excellent menu and choice for those not wishing to venture out. There are other restaurants in Braye village and a good selection in St. Anne offering a range of cuisine including French, English, Indian and seafood amongst others, for those happy to wander a little further.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests, at the time of booking.