

France - Butterflies in Normandy

Naturetrek Tour Report

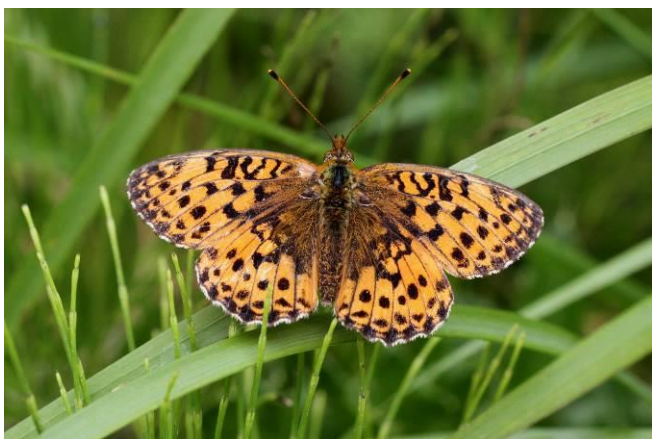
10 - 14 July 2014



Faust's Burnet



Large Tortoiseshell



Lesser Marbled Fritillary



Wood White

Report & Images compiled by Tom Brereton



Naturetrek Cheriton Mill Cheriton Alresford Hampshire SO24 0NG England

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

F: +44 (0)1962 736426

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour Leader:	Tom Brereton
Participants:	Andrew Harrop Eleanor Pottinger Mary Robins Irene Draper Simon Anthony Jennifer Anthony Chris Rose Steve McLellan Karen McLellan Freddie Ingall Alison Lowe Carolyn Jenkins Colin Thubron

Summary

Butterfly highlights: 43 species including Large Chequered Skipper, Alcon Blue, Ilex Hairstreak, Large Tortoiseshell, Lesser Purple Emperor, Purple Emperor, Lesser Marbled Fritillary, Pearly Heath, Weaver's Fritillary and Berger's Clouded Yellow.

Other wildlife highlights:

Summer Lady's Tresses, Heath Lobelia, chalkhill flowers; 106 species of bird including Night Heron, Great White Egret, White Stork, Montagu's Harrier, Honey Buzzard, Melodious Warbler, Bluethroat, Savi's Warbler, Marsh Warbler, Fan-tailed Warbler, Short-toed Treecreeper, Red-backed Shrike, Crested Tit and Cirl Bunting; a good variety of moths (including Faust's Burnet, Fiery Clearwing and Cistus Forester) and 18 species of dragonfly (including Small Pincertail, Dainty Damselfly and Scarce Emerald Damselfly).

Cultural Highlights:

The Bayeux Tapestry, the historic Mulberry harbour in Arromanches, Omaha D-Day Beach, St. Mere Eglise and regional gourmet cuisine

Day 1

Thursday 10th July

After meeting the group by the ferry terminal, we departed Poole at 08:30 on the ferry for our journey across the western English Channel. Things began well on the Lepidoptera front, with a Large Yellow Underwing moth spotted on the decks before we had departed. With the Fastcraft not available we took the more leisurely voyage on the Brittany Ferries Barfleur, a journey of some four and a half hours. The start of our journey saw us navigating through Poole Harbour, one of the largest and most unspoilt natural harbours in England. The ferry passes close to a brackish lagoon on the eastern side of Brownsea, an island managed by the National Trust and famed for Red Squirrels and Britain's biggest Little Egret breeding colony.

Several species of wader were on and around the lagoon including Redshank, Black-tailed Godwit and Oystercatcher, with variety added by several Mediterranean Gulls, Little Egret and moderate numbers of Sandwich and Common Terns. In Poole Harbour there were several Shags and an unseasonal Eider. Once we passed Durlston Bay, sea conditions were bumpy (sea state 5 with a brisk NE wind), so there was little chance of picking up any cetaceans. Seabirds were in evidence though, with a trickle of Gannets, smaller numbers of Fulmar and brief views of a Storm-petrel seen briefly by Tom. As we approached Cherbourg, large numbers of Shag were seen in the harbour. Disembarkation by early afternoon was rapid, and we were soon on our way south travelling through the Cotentin Peninsula, picking up a Hobby along the way.

Our main stop of the afternoon was a new site, a chalk hill near Trevieres, midway between Carentan and Bayeux that had been recommended to us by a local naturalist. The scrubby slopes were of considerable interest supporting 20 species of butterfly including Swallowtail, Brown Argus, Silver washed Fritillary and our only Clouded Yellows and Comma of the holiday. Bird highlights were a White Stork circling over the surrounding water meadows and two singing Melodious Warblers. The surrounding hedgerows were sheltered from the wind proving attractive to Banded Agrion, White-legged Damselfly and a Broad-bodied Chaser.

After an enjoyable session it was time to head east towards our base for the holiday, Arromanches, located along the north coast of Normandy close to Bayeux and in the Department of Calvados. After driving for a further 30 minutes or so we arrived at the charming and friendly Hotel de la Marine, spectacularly located right by the sea overlooking the historic Mulberry harbour ruins. With 2014 marking the 70th anniversary of D-Day and the Battle of Normandy, there was a bustling and lively atmosphere in the town. In the evening we were treated to a beautiful prepared French meal in the hotel restaurant, with our table overlooking the sea.

Day 2

Friday 11th July

Before breakfast Tom and a small number of the group took a short walk to an area of cliff-top coastal grassland west of the harbour. Birds in the coastal scrub included several Whitethroats, Yellowhammers and Blackcaps, whilst in Arromanches we recorded Spotted Flycatcher, Rock Pipit, Mediterranean Gull, a family party of Black Redstarts and Serin. Wildflowers present along the coastal path included Lizard Orchid, Pyramidal Orchid, Sulphur Clover and Spiny Restharrow.

After breakfast, we headed south-east for an hour or so to Les Monts d'Eraines nature reserve, an area of chalk hills east of Falaise, where we were to spend the day. The morning was spent in a scrubby glade and surrounding grassland areas in the north-west corner of the reserve. Conditions were predominantly cloudy and butterfly activity was suppressed, though over the course of the morning a good variety of species were seen, amongst them Weaver's Fritillary, Dark Green Fritillary, Wall Brown, Brimstone and Small Heath. Several Bright Wave moths were seen, which is a rare species in the UK restricted to a small number of sites in southeast England.

Our picnic lunch was taken at the aerodrome, where an exciting find on a nearby bush was a stunning Fiery Clearwing moth. After lunch, we spent the afternoon exploring the remainder of the reserve, with the priority being to carefully search the scarp edges for the rare Faust's Burnet. In this area and to our delight it was not long before we located this diminutive yet brightly coloured and beautiful moth.

With increasingly sunny weather, butterfly diversity was much higher than in the morning. There were large numbers of Marbled White, Meadow Brown and Small White, frequent encounters of Berger's Clouded Yellow, Weaver's Fritillary and Dark Green Fritillary amongst 15 other species. On the moth front, numbers of Burnets were well down on previous years, but compensation came in the form of Cistus Forester, Vapourer and Oak Eggar.

The grassland slopes were in fabulous condition, supporting a colourful display of calcareous grassland wildflowers. We recorded some very interesting species rare/absent from the UK, including Hare's-ear, Cypress Spurge, Meadow Clary, Mountain Germander, Wall Germander, Juniper, Cut-leaved Self-heal, Large Self-heal, Lizard Orchid and large quantities of the asphodel, *Anthericum ramosum*. Birds were good too with cracking views of Honey Buzzard, together with Hobby, Cirl Bunting, Tree Pipit, Melodious Warbler, Turtle Dove and a for the second year in succession Red-backed Shrikes on breeding territory.

Back in Arromanches, a walk after dinner produced a number of moths attracted to lights around the museum, including Swallowtail and several Yellow-tails.

Day 3

Saturday 12th July

For the pre-breakfast period, a bird watching excursion was organised to the Natura-2000 designated marshes east of Arromanches. By scanning the marshes and shooting pools and walking a short way along the beach, we were able to pick up an interesting selection of birds that included Mediterranean Gull, Pochard, Ringed Plover, Turtle Dove, Fan-tailed Warbler, Corn Bunting and several Little Egrets.

After breakfast we drove south-east for an hour and a quarter to the richest butterfly site on our itinerary, the Forêt de Gouffern. This large, mixed forest east of Argentan supports a superb variety of wildlife in part due to the varied geology and the private forestry practices, which are less uniform than those adopted in state-owned French forests. The weather was marginal for butterfly activity, with light drizzle but fairly warm temperatures. First we explored a large and increasingly scrubby grassy glade at the entrance of the western section of the wood which supports a calcareous grassland flora, including *Vincetoxicum*. In spite of the dull conditions we were able to disturb several noteworthy species, including several surprisingly fresh Pearly Heaths indicating a late season (for this species) and Wood White, along with large numbers of Ringlet.

After an early picnic lunch and with improving weather, we then headed east along a pylon line, which is one of the best butterfly habitats in the forest. This had been cut recently and consequently was in good condition for butterflies. The combination of woodland edge and adjacent open sunny flower-ridge glade habitat which was damp in places, proved extremely attractive to both woodland and grassland butterflies. Amongst the many species seen, highlights included Lesser Marbled Fritillary, Weaver's Fritillary, Dark Green Fritillary, White Admiral, Large Chequered Skipper and Lesser Purple Emperor, the latter including at least one of the *Chytie* variety. Open areas supported large numbers of common grassland butterflies, especially Small Skipper, Essex Skipper, Large Skipper, Marbled White and Ringlet, bringing the day tally to 27 species. Bird highlights were Honey Buzzard, Short-toed Treecreeper, Marsh Tit, Tree Pipit and Melodious Warbler. The moth highlight was a beautiful Scarlet Tiger, whilst dragonflies seen included Golden-ringed Dragonfly.

Our final stop of the day was a lovely flower-rich glade surrounded by Oak trees and Willow bushes in the eastern part of the forest. Again, this produced some excellent sightings, including a Lesser Purple Emperor perched high in the canopy which gave excellent views in the telescope, superb close views of a Large Tortoiseshell, plus White Admiral and several Silver washed Fritillary.

Later we had our final fantastic meal in the La Marine hotel restaurant, where we were able to relax and reflect on another excellent day for butterflies.

Day 4

Sunday 13th July

Our final early morning bird watch saw us returning to the marshes east of Arromanches. This time we decided to follow the coastal path at the western end of the marshes. This proved productive for wetland passerines, with Reed Warbler, Sedge Warbler and Reed Bunting all being picked up, whilst a Savi's Warbler was singing a good distance away and a Bearded Tit was 'pinging'. The undoubted highlights though were two Bluethroats – an adult and a recently fledged juvenile which were showing extremely well beside the road. Another great pick up was a juvenile Night Heron, which flew right over our heads as it passed west, whilst roadside trees held Serin and Turtle Dove and a nearby chalk bank held numerous spikes of flowering Fragrant Orchids and Pyramidal Orchids.

After breakfast, we made our customary trip to the beautiful and world-famous Bayeux tapestry – which proved as popular as ever with this year's group. After the Tapestry, we headed west to the wet heathland and Pine forests in the south-west corner of the Cotentin Peninsula. By late morning we had reached Lessay, where weather conditions were good for butterfly watching. First we explored a wide ride composed of wet heathland vegetation which cuts through open boggy Scots Pine forest. Along the ride, large numbers of Silver-studded Blue butterflies were present, together with moderate numbers of Meadow Brown and Marbled White and the first of several Large Chequered Skippers seen over the day. The ride was noteworthy for the presence of hundreds of spikes of Summer Lady's Tresses orchid in full flower (Lessay is one of the most important localities in Europe to see this diminutive rare wildflower), which was a truly fabulous sight. Other plants of interest along the ride included various wet heathland specialists such as Marsh St John's-wort, Heath Spotted Orchid, Lesser Skullcap, Heath Lobelia, Meadow Thistle, Whorled Caraway and Oblong-leaved Sundew.

Before lunch, we walked the length of the ride to a cross section which is a hotspot for one of the star species of this holiday, the rare Alcon Blue. An Ilex Hairstreak was a welcome pick up in this area, and to our relief it was not long before a male Alcon Blue was seen, giving close views. Tom walked briskly back to the minibus to prepare lunch, whilst the group took a more leisurely pace. Birds of interest along the ride, during and around our picnic spot, included Tree Pipit, Short-toed Treecreeper, Crested Tit and Honey Buzzard. After lunch we returned to the ride intersection from a closer parking bay, picking up a second Alcon Blues. At the intersection, a small pond supported an interesting variety of dragonflies due to the presence of both acidic and base-rich water sources in the vicinity. Amongst a dozen or so species recorded highlights included Small Pincertail, Downy Emerald, Small Red Damselfly, Scarce Emerald Damselfly and Dainty Damselfly. After an enjoyable spell at the pond dragonfly watching, we explored further along one of the rides to an area bordered by mature broad-leaved woodland. This proved to be a good area for both woodland and grassland species with sightings of Purple Hairstreak, two Purple Emperors and Silver-washed Fritillary being of particular interest.

Of the moths, Common Heaths were common along the rides, whilst a few Oak Eggars and migrant Silver Ys were noted.

Day 5

Monday 14th July

The final morning and by 09:00 am we had departed Arromanches. With the switch to a different ferry, we now had the best part of a full day to enjoy butterfly watching on the final day, due to the later ferry departure. The extra time gave opportunity to visit Le Cap in the Carentan Marshes Regional Nature Park located at the base of the Cotentin Peninsula. This vast marsh is rich in wildlife and our visit today did not disappoint. Birds hunting over the marshes included Hobby, Montagu's Harrier and Marsh Harrier, whilst in the meadows we saw 3 Great White Egrets, White Stork, Whinchat, Lapwing, Yellow Wagtail and many Skylarks.

Leaving Le Cap, we made a five minute driving detour to the attractive small town of Sainte-Mère-Église to view an iconic D-Day site, the dummy paratrooper which hangs from the spire, commemorating the story of John Steele whose parachute got tangled up on the church on D-Day 6th June 1944.

We then headed across country to Vauville Nature Reserve situated on the north-west coast of the Cotentin Peninsula. This diverse habitat comprised of sand dunes, marsh, scrub and a large freshwater pond is superb for wildlife. Lunch was taken at a delightful little secluded and sheltered picnic spot near the shores of Vauville Bay. Here, Andrew spotted the only Painted Lady of the trip whilst lunch was being made. After another huge picnic lunch, we toasted seeing an excellent variety butterfly species on the holiday with a superlative bottle of Cremant de Loire.

At Vauville Nature Reserve there was plenty of butterfly activity along the pathway through the coastal dunes, including good numbers of Lulworth Skippers and Common Blue, plus Wall Brown. Moths included 6-spot Burnets, Hummingbird Hawk-moth and Silver Y. On and around the main pond, there was a lot of bird activity that included Hobby, Hen Harrier and Pochard. Plant life was impressive with some quality species recorded including Sea Holly, Carline Thistle, large quantities of Burnet Rose, and the rare Western Spiked Speedwell. Other noteworthy wildlife included Tree Frog and Muskrat.

Our final French wildlife site was a coastal marsh east of Cherbourg, where hoped for Marsh Warblers were soon located. A Small Copper was also seen, this being our 43rd species of butterfly, making it the best ever Normandy Butterflies trip (our 12th) in terms of numbers of species seen

We arrived at the port of Cherbourg, and were soon safely on board and heading home across the English Channel. In stark contrast to our outbound crossing, the sea was smooth and the skies largely cloudless. The crossing was quiet, save for regular sightings of Gannets. At Poole we said our warm goodbyes and congratulated ourselves on what had been a cracking trip, for butterflies and other wildlife.

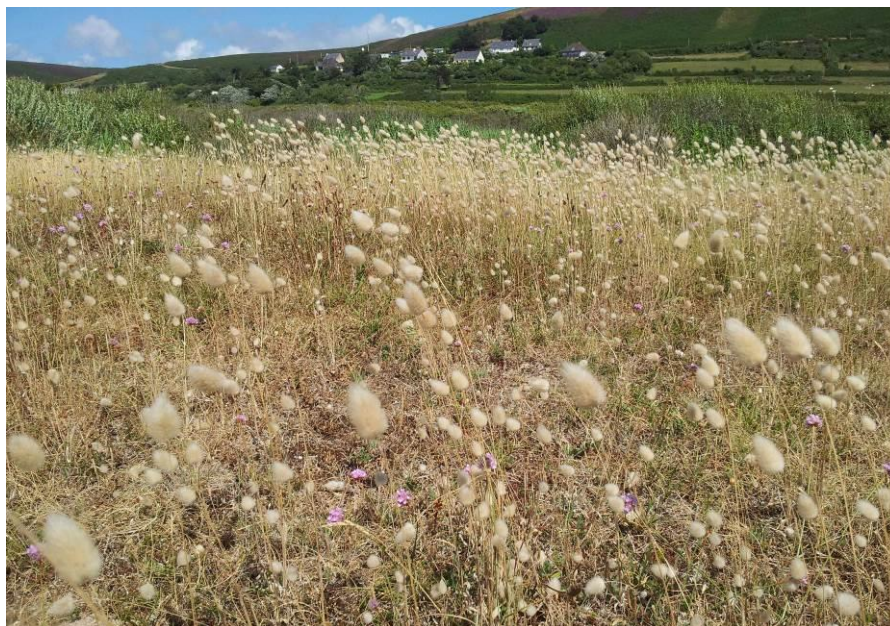
Receive our e-newsletter

Join the Naturetrek e-mailing list and be the first to hear about new tours, additional departures and new dates, tour reports and special offers. Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk to sign up.

Naturetrek Facebook

We are delighted to launch the Naturetrek Facebook page so that participants of Naturetrek tours can remain in touch after the holiday and share photos, comments and future travel plans.

Setting up a personal profile at www.facebook.com is quick, free and easy. The [Naturetrek Facebook page](#) is now live; do please pay us a visit!



Vauville Dunes

Species List

Butterflies (Blank rows = species recorded in other years)

	Common name	Scientific name	Family	July				
				10	11	12	13	14
1	Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>	Papilionidae	1				
2	Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>	Pieridae	10	15	5	2	5
3	Small White	<i>Artogeia (Pieris) rapae</i>	Pieridae	30	30	20	10	20
4	Green-veined White	<i>Artogeia (Pieris) napi</i>	Pieridae	20	2	1		
5	Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias crocea</i>	Pieridae	2				
6	Berger's Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias australis</i>	Pieridae		15			
7	Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>	Pieridae		10	5	5	
8	Wood White	<i>Leptidea sinapis</i>	Pieridae			1		
9	Purple Hairstreak	<i>Quercusia quercus</i>	Lycaenidae				1	
10	Ilex Hairstreak	<i>Satyrium ilicis</i>	Lycaenidae				1	
11	Small Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>	Lycaenidae					2
12	Sooty Copper	<i>Heodes tityrus</i>	Lycaenidae					
13	Holly Blue	<i>Celastrinas argiolus</i>	Lycaenidae	1	1	3	2	3
14	Alcon Blue	<i>Maculinea alcon</i>	Lycaenidae				2	
15	Silver-studded Blue	<i>Plebejus argus</i>	Lycaenidae				120	
16	Brown Argus	<i>Aricia agestis</i>	Lycaenidae	1	1		2	5
17	Mazarine Blue	<i>Cyaniris semiargus</i>	Lycaenidae					
18	Chalkhill Blue	<i>Lysandra coridon</i>	Lycaenidae					
19	Adonis Blue	<i>Lysandra bellargus</i>	Lycaenidae					
20	Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>	Lycaenidae	4				10
21	White Admiral	<i>Limentis camilla</i>	Nymphalidae			5		
22	Poplar Admiral	<i>Limenitis populi</i>	Nymphalidae					
23	Purple Emperor	<i>Apatura iris</i>	Nymphalidae				2	
24	Lesser Purple Emperor	<i>Apatura ilia</i>	Nymphalidae			3		
25	Peacock	<i>Inachis io</i>	Nymphalidae	2	10	20		
26	Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	Nymphalidae	2	1	5		3
27	Painted Lady	<i>Cynthia cardui</i>	Nymphalidae					1
28	Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>	Nymphalidae	3	1	1		
29	Large Tortoiseshell	<i>Nymphalis polychloros</i>	Nymphalidae			1		
30	Comma	<i>Polygonia c-album</i>	Nymphalidae	1				
31	Map	<i>Araschnia levana</i>	Nymphalidae					
32	Silver-washed Fritillary	<i>Argynnis paphia</i>	Nymphalidae	1		5	1	
33	Dark Green Fritillary	<i>Mesoacidalia (Argyryniss) aglaia</i>	Nymphalidae		10	1		
34	Queen of Spain Fritillary	<i>Issoria lathonia</i>	Nymphalidae					
35	Heath Fritillary	<i>Mellicta athalia</i>	Nymphalidae					
36	Weaver's Fritillary	<i>Boloria dia</i>	Nymphalidae					
37	Marbled White	<i>Melanargia galathea</i>	Satyridae		15	2		
38	Common Grayling	<i>Hipparchia semele</i>	Satyridae	3	100	50	5	
39	Lesser Marbled Fritillary	<i>Brenthis ino</i>	Nymphalidae			1		
40	Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary	<i>Boloria selene</i>	Nymphalidae					
41	Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>	Satyridae	5	40	30	50	10
42	Ringlet	<i>Aphantopus hyperantus</i>	Satyridae			150		
43	Gatekeeper	<i>Pyronia tithonus</i>	Satyridae	10	10	2	15	30
44	Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>	Satyridae		20	2		5
45	Pearly Heath	<i>Coenonympha arcania</i>	Satyridae			15		
46	Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>	Satyridae	3	2	2		2
47	Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>	Satyridae	1	5			1

	Common name	Scientific name	Family	July				
				10	11	12	13	14
48	Mallow Skipper	<i>Carcharodus alceae</i>	<i>Hesperidae</i>					
49	Dingy Skipper	<i>Erynnis tages</i>	<i>Hesperidae</i>		1			
50	Large Chequered Skipper	<i>Heteropterus morpheus</i>	<i>Hesperidae</i>			1	6	
51	Essex Skipper	<i>Thymelicus lineola</i>	<i>Hesperidae</i>			10		
52	Small Skipper	<i>Thymelicus sylvestris (flavus)</i>	<i>Hesperidae</i>	3		30	10	1
53	Large Skipper	<i>Ochlodes venatus</i>	<i>Hesperidae</i>	5	5	10	20	2
54	Lulworth Skipper	<i>Thymelicus acteon</i>	<i>Hesperidae</i>	2				20
55	Red Underwing Skipper	<i>Spialia sertorius</i>	<i>Hesperidae</i>					

Moths

6-spot Burnet	5-spot Burnet	Faust's Burnet
Common Heath	Latticed Heath	Common Silver Y
Grass Moth spp.	Scarlet Tiger	Hummingbird Hawk-moth
<i>Nematopogodon</i> sp.	<i>Pyrausta nigrata</i>	Yellow-tail
Latticed Heath	Bright Wave	Oak Eggar
Swallowtail	Yellow Shell	Cistus Forester
Fiery Clearwing	Vapourer	Large Yellow Underwing

Dragonflies

Azure Damselfly	Banded Agrion	Beautiful Demoiselle
Black-tailed Skimmer	Blue-tailed Damselfly	Broad-bodied Chaser
Common Darter	Dainty Damselfly	Downy Emerald
Emperor Dragonfly	Four-spotted Chaser	Golden-ringed Dragonfly
Keeled Skimmer	Large Red Damselfly	Scarce Emerald Damselfly
Small Red Damselfly	Small Pincertail	White-legged Damselfly

Grasshoppers & Crickets

Great Green Bush-cricket	Dark Bush-cricket	Roesel's Bush-cricket
Long-winged Conehead	Field Grasshopper	Meadow Grasshopper
Common Green Grasshopper	Stripe-winged Grasshopper	Speckled Bush-cricket
Field Cricket	Large Marsh Grasshopper	

Mammals

Rabbit	Roe Deer	Muskrat
Red Fox	Brown Hare	Hedgehog
Vole sp.		

Birds

Little Grebe	Fulmar	Gannet
Cormorant	Shag	White Stork
Grey Heron	Little Egret	Great White Egret
Shelduck	Mallard	Teal
Pochard	Common Scoter	Hobby
Buzzard	Honey Buzzard	Marsh Harrier

Montagu's Harrier	Kestrel	Hobby
Sparrowhawk	Quail	Coot
Moorhen	Dunlin	Oystercatcher
Redshank	Black-tailed Godwit	Curlew
Ringed Plover	Dunlin	Black-headed Gull
Mediterranean Gull	Herring Gull	Lesser Black Backed Gull
Great Black Backed Gull	Common Tern	Sandwich tern
Turtle Dove	Wood Pigeon	Collared Dove
Feral Pigeon	Stock Dove	Swift
Green Woodpecker	Great Spotted Woodpecker	Swallow
House Martin	Sand Martin	Skylark
Tree Pipit	Meadow Pipit	Rock Pipit
White wagtail	Yellow Wagtail	Grey Wagtail
Red-bakced Shrike	Wren	Duncock
Robin	Bluethroat	Stonechat
Whinchat	Black Redstart	Song Thrush
Blackbird	Blackcap	Savi's Warbler
Marsh Warbler	Garden Warbler	Whitethroat
Sedge Warbler	Fan-tailed Warbler	Reed Warbler
Melodious Warbler	Chiffchaff	Spotted Flycatcher
Goldcrest	Great Tit	Blue Tit
Coal Tit	Long-tailed Tit	Marsh Tit
Crested Tit	Bearded Tit	Short-toed Treecreeper
Nuthatch	Jay	Magpie
Rook	Crow	Jackdaw
Starling	House Sparrow	Chaffinch
Bullfinch	Linnet	Greenfinch
Goldfinch	Serin	Bullfinch
Reed Bunting	Corn Bunting	Yellowhammer
Cirl Bunting		



Fiery Clearwing