Winter Wildlife in the West Country
15-19 November 2027



Hawfinch by Clive Dodd

Explore the ancient woodlands of the Forest of Dean on a guided wildlife break in search of special birds and mammals that call this magical place home. Winter is a fantastic time to visit to see many bird species due to fewer leaves on the trees and increased numbers having arrived from the continent. Along with birds, the Forest of Dean is home to the largest population of Wild Boar – evening drives and walks will give you a great chance to spot these elusive mammals.

Itinerary

Join us for a five-day wildlife adventure combining the ancient woodlands of the Forest of Dean with the spectacular wetlands of the Somerset Levels. We'll spend time exploring woodland trails and key birding sites in search of winter visitors and resident specialities, while evening drives and walks offer opportunities to encounter the area's elusive Wild Boar. We'll then visit Slimbridge WWT before continuing to the Somerset Levels, where extensive wetlands attract impressive numbers of wintering wildfowl and waders. We'll search for sought-after species such as Eurasian Bittern and Bearded Tit, and hope to witness the unforgettable spectacle of Common Starlings gathering in vast

flocks at dusk. With a varied itinerary spanning two outstanding wildlife destinations, this tour offers a fantastic opportunity to experience some of Britain's most memorable winter wildlife spectacles.

Accommodation will be at the historical 3* Speech House Hotel, located in Coleford, Gloucestershire for the first two nights, before we move to the 3* The Swan Hotel, located in Wells, Somerset for the remaining two nights.

Day 1: Arrival, forest streams and treetop vistas
Location: Speech House Hotel
We'll meet at the hotel at 12 pm and after an introductory talk, we will head out on our first walk. Following the forest streams, we will look out for Dipper and Grey Wagtail along with other woodland birds such as Marsh Tit, Eurasian Nuthatch and Eurasian Treecreeper. We may stop at New Fancy Viewpoint, which is a great vantage point to look for Eurasian Goshawk and other birds of prey. Crossbill is another target which often perch atop of conifers here.

We will check into the hotel late afternoon ready for our three-course dinner in the historical Verderers' Courtroom. Following this, there is an optional nighttime drive around quieter roads in search of Wild Boar, Fallow Deer and other nocturnal wildlife.

Day 2: Woodland walks and spectacular views
The day begins with an optional pre-breakfast walk or a chance to visit local sites for species such as Hawfinch or Dipper. After breakfast we head to the spectacular viewpoint at Symonds Yat Rock, overlooking the beautiful River Wye and surrounding woodland. This renowned vantage point offers excellent opportunities to watch birds of prey, including Peregrine Falcon and, with luck, the elusive Eurasian Goshawk.

Next, we will head to Parkend village where we will try for Hawfinch. Winter is the best time to see these impressive yet elusive birds and we'll give ourselves the best opportunity to see them.
After a café or pub lunch we will head to Cannop Ponds. Here is an opportunity to get close to smaller woodland birds and be able to pick out key differences for identification. Eurasian Nuthatch, Marsh Tit and Brambling are often seen here. The ponds itself hold many waterbirds including Goosander, Mandarin, Eurasian Wigeon and Little Grebe.

Following dinner, we will head out again on another nighttime drive with a chance to spot Wild Boar and Fallow Deer as they become more active.

Day 3: Slimbridge WWT and The Swan Hotel
Slimbridge attracts impressive numbers of ducks, geese and swans during the colder months, alongside a variety of waders and birds of prey. We will spend the day visiting hides across the reserve, searching for wintering wildfowl including Greater White-fronted Goose, Bewick's Swan and other wetland species while enjoying spectacular views across the Severn Estuary.

Today we shall also move hotels and check-in at The Swan Hotel, located in Wells, Somerset.

Day 4: Ham Wall and Shapwick Heath
Today we will explore the reedbeds of the Somerset Levels. The premier reserves of Ham Wall and Shapwick Heath sit within the Avalon Marshes, which were created from the extraction of peat and now accounts for some 1,500 ha of reedbed and wetland habitat. This reserve is home to healthy populations of Eurasian Bittern, Bearded Tit, Greate Egret and a host of wintering ducks and waders.

The hides are well positioned to overlook the reedbeds and with patience we have a good chance to see a bittern flying past, while the regular Western Marsh Harriers are always a joy to watch hunting.

As dusk falls, thousands to millions of starlings descend on the reedbeds to roost. This is an incredible wildlife spectacle and a highlight of the tour for many. We will position ourselves to witness the starlings gather and murmurate before dropping into the reedbeds for the night.

Day 5: Greylake RSPB
This morning we will head to Greylake RSPB. Packed full of wildfowl and waders, we will look out for European Golden Plover, Water Rail and Common Snipe in the rushes with Eurasian Wigeon, Northern Shoveler and Eurasian Teal filling the waterbodies. This is also a great place to see Merlin and Hen Harrier as they hunt over the scrapes and wet meadow.

We will also keep an eye on BirdGuides for any rare or unusual species that are reported in the area that we may potentially want to see. The tour concludes at approximately 2 pm.

Pricing

Our West Country birding tour offers exceptional value, with the price covering comfortable accommodation, ground transportation, entrance fees to all scheduled sites and reserves, and the expertise of an experienced birding guide.

Priced at £1,599 per person, a single supplement is an additional £250.

A non-refundable deposit of 20% of the total trip price, per person, is required to secure the booking. The final balance is due 60 days before the tour start date.

Included in the price:

- Accommodation throughout the tour at Speech House Hotel for 2 nights and The Swan Hotel for the remaining 2 nights;
- All evening meals from Day 1 to Day 4, and also breakfast from Day 2 through to Day 5;
- Ground transportation during the tour (minibus);
- Services of an experienced birding guide;
- Entrance fees to all scheduled sites and reserves.

Not included:

- International flights to and from the UK;
- Visa fees, if applicable;
- Travel insurance;
- Beverages and lunch;
- Optional activities not specified in the itinerary.

Trip Information

Tour leader
This tour is run exclusively for BirdGuides Travel by WildSpace. Your tour leader will be Arron Roberts.

Group size

Eight, plus tour leader.

Minimum participants
This tour requires a minimum of five confirmed participants. If we do not have the minimum required number of participants, we reserve the right to cancel this tour. We will notify you not less than 30 days before the start of the tour should this be necessary.

Recommended items
- Binoculars;
- Telescope for scanning wildfowl and waders. Your guide will have a scope that will be shared with the group;
- Camera and waterproof camera cover;
- Water bottle and fridge bag for lunches on the go;
- Walking poles;
- Comfortable walking shoes;
- Warm and waterproof clothing as the weather can be unpredictable.

Is this tour for me?
- Several nature reserves we visit will have adapted walking trails of hard standing and gravel tracks. Other areas can be uneven underfoot;
- We will be walking on average 2-3 miles per day with plenty of breaks;
- The hotel is adaptable and ground floor rooms can be requested;
- The hotel can adapt to dietary requirements however cannot guarantee the absence of any allergens due to them being prepared in a kitchen containing allergens;
- BirdGuides Travel tours are unsuitable for persons under the age of 16 years old. Please talk to us before booking your trip should you require further information.

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