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Alderney - Wildlife & History in Style!

Prix - **1154.00€** Dates - 21/06 au 25/06/21 Guide - *John Horton and Annabel Finding*

Alderney is the most northerly of the Channel Islands and, despite lying just 8 miles off Normandy's Cotentin Peninsula its relative inaccessibility ensures that it is a peaceful backwater where the pace of life is slow, visitors are sparse and the locals most welcoming! Despite its small size - approximately 3.5 miles long and 1.5 miles wide - the island's rich tapestry of habitats merits close attention from the keen naturalist. In spring northbound bird migration will be in full swing and the island will be adorned with colourful flowers. As spring progresses to summer the seabirds will be back in their nesting colonies offshore and butterflies, moths and dragonflies will be on the wing to enrich the island's natural history. After a scenic flight from Southampton we'll be based for four nights at the splendid and well-appointed Braye Beach Hotel. We will explore the island's diverse patchwork of habitats on foot and by minibus, in search of such birds as Peregrine and Dartford Warbler, as well as visit Gannet colonies and enjoy the island's other seabirds. We will also have a chance to enjoy some bird-ringing at the newly-established Observatory and moth-trapping, as well as to look for some of Alderney's thriving population of Hedgehogs, many of which are leucistic (or 'Blonde').

Alderney is the most northerly of the Channel Islands and, despite lying just 8 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 is a peaceful backwater where the pace of life is slow, visitors are sparse and the locals most welcoming.

Just over 3.5 miles long and 1.5 miles 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 the island will be carpeted with a wonderful display of flowers, the seabirds will be back on their offshore nesting islets and birds will be migrating northward with the chance of a rarity or two! Butterflies and moths emerge as the spring moves in to summer with the chance of unusual species such as Large Tortoiseshell, Glanville Fritillary and Long-tailed Blue. By early autumn the island is at its peaceful best and given favourable weather, a wealth of southbound birds, together with migrant moths, butterflies and dragonflies, enrich the island's natural history.

On this holiday we will explore Alderney on foot, supported, when required, by the local island minibus. Our leisurely walks will each cover 2 to 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, Dartford Warblers 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. Using local experts we will also offer you the chance to enjoy moth-trapping 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 together with all-round naturalist, John Horton, 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 13th 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 an 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!

Highlights

- Stay at the delightful 4-star Braye Beach Hotel, which has fabulous views
- Explore the island, mainly on foot, covering a leisurely 2 to 3 miles each day
- Peregrine, Buzzard, Raven & Dartford Warbler among the island's special birdlife
- Visit Gannet colonies (holding some 2% of the world population) on Les Etacs & Ortac
- Boat excursion if weather permits to view Gannet colonies, other seabirds & marine-life
- Enjoy bird-ringing and moth-trapping!
- Flights to & from the mainland included in the cost of this holiday
- Learn about Alderney's remarkable history
- Led by expert naturalist guides

Responsible destination

Colette

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Dates & Prix

1154.00€

2021

Mon 21st Jun - Fri 25th Jun - 1181 €

2022

Mon 20th Jun - Fri 24th Jun - 1299 €

* These tours are operated by Naturetrek (ABTA Y6206) for which Nature et Terroir acts as agent.

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Journalier

Day 1 Fly Alderney

Unlike the other Channel Islands, Alderney cannot be reached by means of a scheduled ferry service, either from the 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 this itinerary, we plan to fly you on an afternoon 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 leaders. From here a minicoach 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 forthcoming days.

Traditionally, we have all dined as a group at the Braye Beach Hotel on the first night, allowing everybody to get to know each other and the guides, in an informal setting and often again on the last night for a farewell dinner. 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 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 1790's a barracks was added before German WW2 defences were additionally built into the structure! It is now 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 which is sure to be one of the highlights of the tour.

A short minibus drive will take us across to Fort Albert where the excellent view point allows us to get bearings on the north and east coasts of the island. From there we will drive to the 'Odeon' built by the Germans as a rangefinding tower during the Occupation but bearing a resemblance to the façade of a 1970's cinema. Ascending the tower affords amazing views of Normandy's Cotentin Peninsula across the famous Alderney Race.

Our walk down from the 'Odeon' will 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.

Next, we will explore Longis Common, an area of scrub and open ground favoured by Wheatears, Whinchats, Yellow Wagtails, warblers and pips on migration. Then we'll focus on the Longis Pond, with the recently-built Longis bird hide enabling us to get good views of large collections of hirundines, 'reed' warblers, waterfowl, waders, 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.

On completing our walk, the pleasant 'Old Barn Restaurant' at Longis Bay makes the perfect spot for a break, refreshments and a light lunch.

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.

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.

Day 3

Excursions from Braye Beach Hotel

Generally, each day will start at 9am, after breakfast. Today, we will start with a visit to a private nature reserve to open and examine the contents 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.

We will then drive up to St Anne and spend the rest of the morning in the town, exploring the churchyard and allotments, enjoying a coffee at the Georgian House and then having a period of free time to visit the museum, explore the quirky range of shops or wander around the quaint lanes. The museum is small, but fascinating, and 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. If the weather is fine we will be taking a picnic to enjoy at Cambridge Battery in Fort Tourgis, otherwise we will take shelter for lunch at Jacks Brasserie or the Georgian House. At the Battery, Green Hairstreak and Hairy Bird's-foot Trefoil can be seen.

From here, we'll head along Clonque Bay to Fort Clonque. We will then 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. We will aim to time this walk to coincide with the high tide which offers the opportunity to see waders on the beaches and rocks below. Indeed, we are now within the 'West Coast and Burhou Island Ramsar Site' and are 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 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.

If the weather is suitable in the evening, those that are interested may choose to go out with a local expert in search of Alderney's thriving population of Hedgehogs, many of which are leucistic (or 'Blonde' Hedgehogs).

Day 4

Excursions from Braye Beach Hotel

This morning we will go for a stroll through the Giffoine, the largest area of heathland on Alderney. 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 offshore, that is occupied and busy right up until November when both young and adult birds depart for the 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 whilst, by May, Glanville Fritillaries, Wall Brown (which is still common here, unlike on the mainland) and Green Hairstreaks can be seen.

After this, and depending on the weather, we will either picnic down by Longis Bay with beautiful views over Fort Raz or seek shelter in a local hostelry in town or by the harbour.

The afternoon walk will be from Longis Bay past Fort Houmez Herbe to the lighthouse. In Longis Bay we will scan for resident Shelduck and such waders as Oystercatcher, Curlew and Whimbrel before commencing the coastal trail. As we follow the coastal path we will see carpets of pink-flowered Thrift, dog-violets and Bluebells. This area is also home to the Alderney Sea-lavender, a plant found only here and on Jersey within the United Kingdom. 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 of the Alderney Race. The view across to the French Cotentin Peninsula is spectacular on a clear day. 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!

Refreshments can be enjoyed back on the hotel terrace at the end of the afternoon.

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

Excursion from Braye Beach Hotel and Fly Southampton

A more leisurely start of 10am will allow us to check out of our rooms (luggage can be stored for collection later).

We will make a variety of short walks this morning including a visit through the tunnel to Arch Bay where the Sea Holly is particularly splendid and then on to Mannez Quarry and its bird hide.

If time allows, we may also take a walk to Telegraph Bay with superb views over the southern cliffs to the distant Channel Islands of Sark, Brecqhou, Herm and Guernsey. This is another good area for migrant birds as well as resident species such as Skylark, Peregrine and Dartford Warbler. The flora of the cliff-top fields and heaths is also impressive with Prostrate Broom and Greater Broomrape amongst the familiar pink Thrift.

After a lunch in or around Braye Beach there may be time for some final exploration or last-minute shopping in St Anne.

It is anticipated that the majority of the group will depart Alderney on a late afternoon flight to Southampton airport and this is when our tour will officially end. We will return to the Braye Beach Hotel to collect our bags before being transferred by minibus back to the airport.



Quelques photos...



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