

England Birds & Gardens: Southeast Itinerary

[Link: England Birds & Gardens: Southeast](#)

Tour Overview

This very special tour combines birding with the great British tradition of gardens! We take in gardens that deservedly have international reputations - the incomparable Kew Gardens, Beth Chatto's Garden, Hyde Hall RHS, East Ruston, Wyken Hall, Bressingham Gardens, Barnsdale Gardens and many others not on regular tourist routes and with attractions all their own.

Our birding is at nature reserves and national parks, although naturally there is a suite of birds in the gardens themselves. We target several choice species - Pied Avocet, Dartford Warbler, Bearded Reedling, Cetti's Warbler, Western Marsh Harrier, Stone Curlew, Nightingale and many more.

Starting in London, we first head to the Royal Botanic Garden at Kew before turning northeast to East Anglia, arguably the best birding area in England, where we visit Minsmere, Titchwell, Hickling Broad and Cley among several RSPB nature reserves.

We also offer the [England Birds & Gardens: SW](#) tour in odd-numbered years.

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival



Our England Birds & Gardens: Southeast tour begins today. We meet for dinner to discuss the upcoming adventure. Overnight near Heathrow airport.

Day 2: Kew Gardens



Our first garden visit is to the RBG (Royal Botanic Garden) at Kew with its 300 acres of themed gardens, special collections and wildlife trails. In spring, which can be a capricious season, literally millions of spring bulbs adorn the gardens and woods, including cammasias and bluebells. In the Cherry Walk, thousands of scillas planted beneath its trees can be stunning, along with the total of more than 900,000 wild daffodils, crocuses and snake's head fritillaries planted between the Lilac Garden and the Magnolia Collection. Expect floriferous shows of rhododendrons and azaleas, and spring bedding displays. Kew is a major scientific research centre, with ongoing investigation into plant conservation issues worldwide; Our stroll through woodlands and along the well-reeded ponds at Kew should turn up several woodland birds, including Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers, and waterbirds such as Mandarin Duck, Tufted Duck and such oddities as Egyptian Goose. After lunch and a bit more exploration of Kew, we leave and drive west to exit London, perhaps stopping at a couple of birding sites, We reach the ring road and head northeast to the coastal county of Essex. Overnight near Chelmsford, Essex.

Day 3: Hyde Hall - RHS Garden



In the morning, we visit the Royal Horticultural Society's garden at Hyde Hall. With sweeping panoramas, big open skies and far reaching views, a visit to the 360-acre Hyde Hall estate is unforgettable. It is in an area that has very low rainfall, and this factor, combined with soil conditions and exposed nature of the site, makes it a challenging area for gardening. Never-the-less, the garden boasts an eclectic range of horticultural styles from traditional to modern, providing interest and colour, whatever the weather or time of year. Some highlights include a Dry Garden - showcases a range of drought tolerant plants; Australian and New Zealand Garden - a contemporary garden designed around existing Eucalyptus trees; Hilltop Garden - includes herbaceous borders, island beds, rose garden, herb garden, ponds and woodland garden; Queen Mother's Garden - with meandering paths and a mix of grasses, perennials and roses, and newly designed Kitchen Garden. In the afternoon, we visit Abberton Reservoir and Fingringhoe Wick Nature Reserve. Abberton Reservoir is a wetland of international importance for waterfowl. A visitor centre run by the Essex Wildlife Trust allows panoramic views over the water and shoreline areas. Northern Lapwings, Black-headed Gulls and Common Terns are here, as well as Red-legged Partridge and Sky Larks. Fingringhoe Wyke, another Essex Wildlife Trust site, sits on a small rise overlooking the estuary of the River Colne. The reserve includes a wide variety of habitats, and vistas over mudflats and the estuary provide plenty of opportunities to get good looks at some bird species via the trails and hides. Songbird species include Chiffchaff, Blackcap and Nightingales (often very difficult to see). Little Egret, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Black-bellied Plover, Eurasian Whimbrel, Common Redshank and Dunlin, in smart summer plumage, are here. Overnight near Chelmsford, Essex.

Day 4: Beth Chatto Garden & Marks Hall Gardens & Arboretum



Today we visit the remarkable private garden of Beth Chatto, an internationally recognized garden of innovation and admiration. The Beth Chatto Gardens began in 1960 when the site was an overgrown wasteland between two farms. Faced with all kinds of challenging conditions Beth, with the help of her late husband, Andrew, set out to plant the “right plants in the right place”. With dry and damp soil in both sun and shade, they were able put into practice the underlying principles of “Ecological gardening”. In the afternoon, we take in Marks Hall Gardens and Arboretum. The Gardens and Arboretum feature a tree collection from all the temperate areas of the world set in more than 200 acres of historic landscape. Paths wind their way through the Arboretum, where you can see beautiful vistas and a host of exotic trees from around the world. Overnight in Suffolk.

Day 5: Dunwich Heath, Dunwich Cliffs and Village Ruins



We start the day by visiting Dunwich Heath where we look for traditional heath species such as Dartford Warbler, Stonechat, Greater and Lesser Whitethroats, Greenfinch and Linnet. We walk along the cliffs and drop into the castle ruins, before moving on to the nearby coastal wetland at Minsmere, another large RSPB reserve, in the shadow of the Sizewell nuclear power station. In addition to the freshwater pools and brackish lagoons the site also contains other habitats ranging from woodland to reedbeds and grassy fields, with birds easy to spot close to the trails and from the many hides dotted around at strategic locations. Landbirds include Willow, Cetti's, Sedge and Reed Warblers, Chiffchaff, Blackcap, both Greater and Lesser Whitethroats, Northern Wheatear, and Meadow Pipit. From hides we look for waterbirds - Black-headed and Common Gulls and maybe a Mediterranean Gull, ducks including Gadwall, Eurasian Teal, Eurasian Wigeon and possibly a Garganey, and shorebirds include nesting Pied Avocets, a specialty of the area, as well as Black-tailed Godwit, Ruddy Turnstone, Common Redshank, Dunlin, Northern Lapwing, and Eurasian Oystercatcher. Terns include Little, Common and Sandwich. From raised hides overlooking the vast expanse of reeds we look for Western Marsh Harrier, Great Bittern, Water Rail and Bank Swallows, as well as Chinese Water Deer and Konik ponies. Overnight in Suffolk.

Day 6: Westleton Heath & Minsmere



Depending upon our luck with heathland birds at Dunwich Heath, we may visit Westleton Heath for a second chance at ones we may have missed. We spend the rest of day at Minsmere. Overnight in Suffolk.

Day 7: Bressingham Gardens & Wyken Hall



At this time of year, our main interest is the spectacular displays of shrubs and trees at Foggy Bottom. The island beds that have inspired gardeners and gardening styles worldwide will not be at their flowering best although one can see innovative plantings that incorporate herbaceous perennials, evergreen and deciduous trees and shrubs (native and exotic species) as well as seasonal bulbs. Under the horticultural hands of the third generation of the Bloom dynasty, the gardens continue to evolve and incorporate new plants as they are developed. Wyken Hall Gardens is a romantic 4-acre garden, designed with a series of 'rooms' wrapped around a cosy pink house. The knot and herb gardens were designed by Arabella Lennox-Boyd. There is a kitchen garden, an old fashion rose garden enclosed by a hornbeam hedge and rose pergola, herbaceous borders, a wild garden, wildflower meadow, birch copse, gazebo and beech maze. Whimsical touches include a porch with rocking-chairs and sculptural wildlife dotted around the house and garden. Overnight near Thetford, Norfolk.

Day 8: Thetford Forest & Cavenham Heath



This morning we visit Thetford Forest and the Lynford Arboretum. Thetford Forest is the largest lowland pine forest in Britain. The forest is largely surrounded by farmland, and has a high level of biodiversity. It is home to large populations of hares, rabbits and pheasants, several species of deer - Muntjac, Roe Deer and a small population of Red Deer - and scarce breeding birds such as Woodlark, Nightjar, Goshawk, Common Crossbill, and Siskin. Cavenham Heath is well known for its population of Stone Curlew (Eurasian Thicknee). We then head northeast towards the Norfolk coast. En route we stop at Fairhaven Woodland Garden; a wildlife garden thriving in an ancient woodland, tucked away in the heart of Britain's magical waterland, the Broads National Park. It is 130 acres of cultivated, wild and natural plantings. Overnight in Norfolk.

Day 9: Hickling Broad & East Ruston Gardens



This morning we visit Hickling Broad in Norfolk. The Norfolk Broads are a series of marshes and ponds formed when medieval peat diggings were flooded. We look here for European Kingfisher, Cetti's Warbler, Eurasian Hobby and Common Crane, a few pairs of which breed in this area. In the afternoon, we visit a remarkable garden, East Ruston Old Vicarage, a 32 acre garden incorporating formal design, enormous decorative exuberance and brilliant planting. It lies close to the North Sea but is well protected by windbreaks, which create a unique micro-climate making it possible to grow many tender plants. The individual gardens include herbaceous borders, cutting and vegetable gardens, exotic garden, Desert wash, Mediterranean garden, sunken garden, autumn borders and a fabulous cornfield planted with the 'weeds' of yesteryear. Sculptures and imaginatively planted pots and containers plus finely detailed walls and gates all play their decorative part. The garden grows yearly as the owners continue to refine and develop more, and larger, areas. Overnight in Norfolk.

Day 10: Cley Marshes & Titchwell RSPB reserve



Cley Marshes Nature Reserve on the north Norfolk coast is one of the UK's finest bird watching sites. Pools and scrapes, all within easy view of hides, are full of unusual and interesting birds, including highlights such as Pied Avocet, Spotted Redshank, European Woodcock, huge numbers of waterfowl and shorebirds, and Brent geese. The shingle beach and saline lagoons, along with the grazing marsh and reedbed, support large numbers of Bearded Reedlings. The RSPB site at Titchwell Marsh is a popular reserve on the north Norfolk coast. A walk from the visitor centre down to the sandy beach takes you past reedbeds and shallow lagoons, which are often full of birds. There are many benches and wheelchair-accessible hides. In summer, Western Marsh-Harriers float over reeds, where Bearded Reedlings nest. On the lagoons are avocets, gulls and terns. Overnight in Norfolk.

Day 11: Barnsdale Gardens



The thirty-eight themed gardens at Barnsdale should have something to appeal to the individual gardeners although at this time of year, there may not be a floral show as the weather can be unpredictable and bloom time may be delayed. There is a wide range of garden styles and planting schemes to inspire the novice or veteran gardener. Barnsdale also prides itself as being a peat free garden developed on organic principles. Next door to Barnsdale is Rutland Water, among the most important waterfowl sites in the U.K. We will drop in to Anglian Water Bird Watching Centre for a scan of the wetlands, with a special look for nesting Ospreys. We then return to Heathrow in the early evening. Overnight near Heathrow airport.

Day 12: Departure

Our England Birds & Gardens: Southeast tour ends today. You can depart anytime to catch flights home from Heathrow.

What to Expect

Driving distances will usually be short on our England Birds & Gardens tour, with a couple of longish drives as we travel north birding into East Anglia. Walking will be mostly relatively easy and leisurely. Comfortable walking shoes will be fine. The weather should be mild and pleasant, but it can be cool and windy along the coast, and we can expect rain at some time during the tour so an umbrella or waterproof clothing is recommended. The excellent system of nature reserves and RSPB sites in England should ensure a good list of species of birds and other wildlife, and we make good use of them, concentrating on the specialties in each. Our visits to gardens will be relaxed and we should have ample time to appreciate each one.

Each evening, the list of birds and other wildlife will be reviewed, and plans for the next day will be discussed.

What's Included

Tour Price Includes

- All accommodations
- All meals
- Ground transportation
- One guide with 4 - 5 participants and two guides with 6 - 10 participants
- Park, conservation and entrance fees

Tour Price Does Not Include

- Flight to and from start/end location
 - Travel Insurance
 - Items of a personal nature
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