

Welsh Wild *life* Breaks

Mid Wales Summer Wildlife and Osprey Safari

Two and a half days exploring all manner of wildlife of Mid and West Wales – from owls and ospreys to bees and badger tracks – and maybe some dolphins and seals too! Add this to a hidden valley with its own imposing castle, and birds that still think they're by the seashore 4 miles inland. It's a safari and mystery tour combined! Let's see what we can find.....



Itch the Little Owl

Day 1. Evening Taster

We'll collect you from Machynlleth station, or arrive by car at your leisure at Gogarth Hall Farm, between Machynlleth and Aberdyfi, your home for the weekend, and meet Deilwen Breese, who'll be looking after your accommodation (and feeding you huge breakfasts!) for your stay. Park your car and don't worry about driving again until you leave. You can relax and take stock of the lovely surroundings, and if you're not too tired, we could try for a short walk before dinner, maybe down at picturesque Aberdyfi or the grounds at Gogarth Hall Farm, looking out for bats if it's dry and not too windy.

We can eat at cosy Riverside, just down the road, and discuss our itinerary for your holiday.



Gogarth Hall Farm Courtyard



Aberdyfi and the Dyfi Estuary

Day 2: West Wales Coast and Surroundings.

Morning: A Taste of Honey

We start out at around 8.30 am with a drive down to near New Quay on the West Wales coast. Famous for its dolphins and its ice cream, it also has other claims to fame. Its quay is actually not new, but a listed structure with much heritage. The New Quay Harbour Act was passed in 1834 and a stone pier, now a listed structure, was constructed at a cost of £4,700, which started the economy of the bustling town that's there today – most of its income now coming from dolphin tourism and fishing. The pier is very picturesque, its character enhanced by the colourful dinghies stacked up all through the summer.



Early morning in New Quay Harbour



Fishing boats near New Quay

Just a few miles inland is New Quay Honey Farm, tucked away in a beautiful small valley. The bee farm at Cross Inn started over 20 years ago, and now has hundreds of hives spread across the beautiful Ceredigion countryside in small groups which provide blended honey from the depth and diversity of the wildflowers in the county. There is a wonderful display of bees upstairs in the old chapel, so we can get an in-depth view of their social habits and how the hives work. There is also a Meadery at the site which produces a selection of Meads, the oldest alcoholic drink known – we may even have a chance to sample some. And of course, there's a tea room with magnificent cakes!



Honey bees at New Quay Honey Farm



An audience with Itch

After a cuppa, we'll set off for an audience with a "parliament" of owls. Based out of New Quay Honey Farm, New Quay Birds of Prey is a small family run business offering people the opportunity to have a one to one private and personal encounter with one or more of their birds of prey. Maybe Itch the little owl, Cleo, the long-eared owl or Fudge the barn owl. Extremely knowledgeable and dedicated, the whole family love their birds and it's clearly reciprocated. Cleo lays her feather ears down flat and closes her eyes as she's being stroked by them. We have to be quiet and move slowly as we watch, and possibly, handle the owls, but it's an unforgettable experience.

Afternoon – dolphin spotting boat trip

After a leisurely picnic lunch among buzzing bees and insects in the little valley around the honey farm, we'll head down into New Quay for a 2 hour boat trip to try and see bottlenose dolphins, not to mention thousands of seabirds, and the magnificent Ceredigion coastline. We join the Ermol V in New Quay harbour and set off on a maritime adventure. Keep your eyes peeled, you're as likely to see dolphins from the harbour as from the boat. We sail back south along the Ceredigion coast, past Birds Rock, the Caves, Cwmttydu and Ynys Lochtyn, on the lookout for seabirds, seals and porpoises as well as dolphins.



Red Admiral Butterfly, New Quay Honey Farm

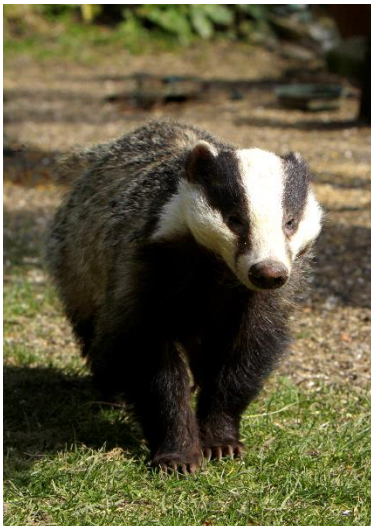


Bottlenose dolphin, New Quay Harbour



Guillemots bathing at Birds Rock, New Quay

On return to harbour, we'll head leisurely back north, stopping off at the Arts Centre café in Aberystwyth for an early supper. When we've finished, and maybe taken a quick look at some of the exhibitions on there, if you're not too tired, and the weather is with us, we can go and look at some evening wildlife near to Gogarth Hall Farm. If we're very quiet, still and lucky enough, we might just spot a badger, or even some youngsters.



Evening badger, Dysynni Valley

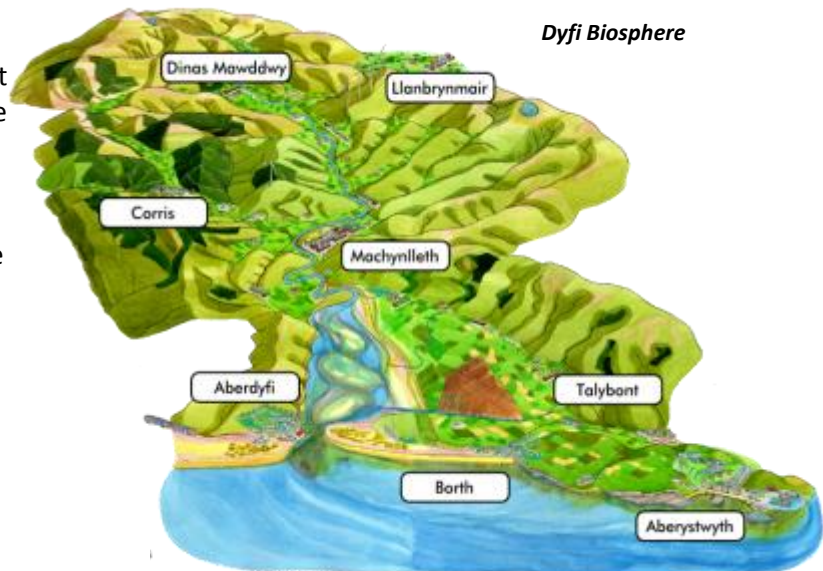


Tail end of a hare, Dysynni Valley

Day 3: Ospreys and Lost Valleys

We'll spend the day today in the Dyfi Biosphere, an internationally recognised site of importance. The UNESCO Dyfi Biosphere is one of a network of worldwide regions where ecology, research, education and people all work together sustainably as part of the environment.

Situated at the coast of south-central Wales in the estuary of the Dyfi River, this biosphere reserve is representative of west coast salt marshes and estuarine systems. The estuary forms one of the most important wildfowl and shorebird centres in Wales. Cors Fochno has a large expanse of primary raised mire and contains a high number of invertebrate species, including some of national and international importance. Upstream along the Dyfi Valley are remnants of native oak woodland.



The estuarine marshes and surrounding land have traditionally been used by farmers to graze horses, cattle and sheep, and recent efforts have been directed at maintaining the traditional Welsh Black breed. Grazing of the saltmarshes is encouraged to maintain suitable conditions for wintering wildfowl. Recently a small herd of Welsh mountain ponies has been introduced to assist rehabilitation of mire-wet grassland habitats. There is a long history of research and monitoring in the area, including vegetation and hydrological analysis, ornithological and tourism impacts research, and invertebrate monitoring. The national nature reserve is visited by about 8,000 students every year.

Morning: Dyfi Osprey Project

Once estuary, reclaimed grazing, then conifer plantation and finally wildlife-rich wetland, the land at Cors Dyfi has seen many changes over the last few hundred years. Today the reserve is a healthy mixture of bog, swamp, wet woodland and scrub supporting a plethora of animals and plants, as well as the magnificent osprey, which bred on the reserve for the first time in 2011.



Monty and Glesni



Inside the 360 Observatory

The ospreys are typically around from April to September. Spring is also the best times to see many of Cors Dyfi's other plants and animals, such as common lizard, which often sun themselves on the edges of the boardwalk, grasshopper, reed & sedge warblers and reed buntings. Early summer

flowers are at their best this time of year, including yellow flag iris and ragged robin, not to mention the cotton grass and luxuriant bog myrtle in the boggy areas. Dragonflies and damselflies abound over the ponds, along with water boatmen and “whirligig” beetles. We should also look out for the visiting water buffalo, which, while very large, are often difficult to spot!



Comfy pillow for a lizard



Bog myrtle in flower



Water buffalo

Monty and his mate generally arrive in April, and eggs are normally laid in late April, hatching in early June. If we are lucky, and the season is successful, we may get good views of the chicks. The 360 Observatory is magnificent and a great place to osprey-watch in all weathers, including a hide for reed and wetland birds, commemorating one of the earlier chicks.

Leaving the 360 observatory, we head back along the boardwalk, taking in the bog myrtle, cottongrass, and other wetland flora, and look and listen out for warblers in the reeds. Sedge warblers and grasshopper warblers are common, and we should spot reed buntings on the willow above the reeds. We’ll spend a little time in the raised hide, an excellent place for siskin, redpolls and other finches if the feeders are filled.



Female broad bodied chaser dragonfly on reed



Redpoll at Dyfi Osprey Project

Afternoon: Talylyn Lake, Castell y Bere and Bird Rock

We’ll drive back through Machynlleth, stopping for a picnic lunch en route. We go past the Cadair Idris Estate and along the shores of the Talylyn Lake. We’ll stop here briefly to see what’s about. There are great crested grebes which breed on the lake, as well as otters, little grebe, coot, mallard, cormorant, grey herons, goosander and dippers. All this as well as being a stunning lake!

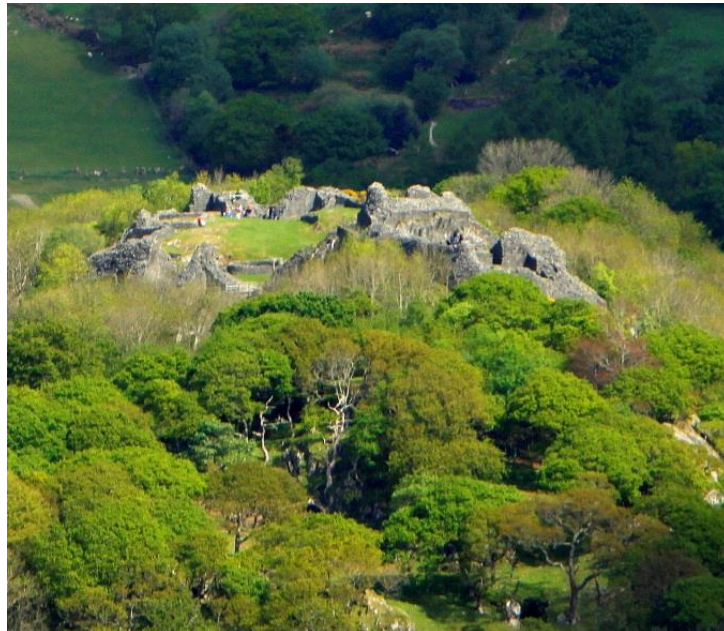


Talyllyn great crested grebe with chick on back



Talyllyn Lake

We'll continue our drive along the Dysynni Valley, if we have time, taking a short detour towards the head of the valley where the historic but luckless Castell y Bere, built by Llewellyn the Great, captured by Edward I and was finally destroyed by Welsh forces all within the 13th century. We'll climb up through more sessile woodland to its lofty heights and dominating presence over the valley. Close by at Llanfihangel y Pennant is the ruin of the home of Mary Jones, famous for her barefoot walk to Bala for a bible.



Castell y Bere

We carry on back down the Dysynni Valley stopping at Craig yr Aderyn or Bird Rock to see what's about. Thousands of years ago, Craig yr Aderyn stood by the seashore with waves lapping at its base, nesting cormorants calling and wheeling out across the sea. As time passed, the sea receded, but long-remembered cormorants still fly up the valley for 4 miles to nest on this lofty rock. This time of year, the cormorant chicks should have hatched and if it's not too windy, we should hear their squeaking calls and the guttural answers of their parents coming in with food. Herring gulls also nest here, and jackdaws will also be about. We may hear ravens 'kronking' overhead too, so it can be a very noisy place! If we listen out, we may also hear chough approaching, with their beautiful vermilion curved scimitar bills, and maybe even hear a kestrel or peregrine calling.



Craig yr Aderyn



Cormorant Flying out from Craig yr Aderyn



Kestrel mobbing raven at Craig yr Aderyn



Chough in flight at Craig yr Aderyn

We aim to arrive back at Gogarth Hall Farm by around 5.30pm, to collect your car, or to drop you at Machynlleth Station to see you on your way home.

Welsh
Wild *life* Breaks

www.welshwildlifebreaks.co.uk

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/suewolfe/>

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What to bring and wear:

- Stout waterproof walking shoes or boots
- Waterproof and windproof jackets and trousers
- Sun hat and sunscreen
- Sunglasses
- Additional layers of clothing just in case (especially for sea trip)
- Woolly hat
- Seasickness tablets
- Binoculars
- Camera with plenty of spare batteries and cards
- Walking poles if you use them

Boat Trips

Please note that boats will only sail if it's safe to do so, and our itinerary is flexible to make the best of the weather and good sailing conditions. If there is unusually severe weather, sailing schedules may be affected. In the unlikely event that our boat trip is cancelled, I plan some excellent wildlife watching and alternative activities, including dolphin-spotting from the shore and any balance of costs will be refunded.