

Welsh Wild *life* Breaks

FULL ITINERARY: Pembrokeshire Wildlife Safari **Tuesday 26th May 2020 – Friday 29th May 2020**

A spectacular journey around the coast and islands of Pembrokeshire, along the coast path and out to sea gannet-spotting. Encounter pelagic birds, seals and cetaceans on ocean trips, see amazing auks and owls on our island gems and get up close and personal with a much-loved group of owls in New Quay. Explore wild headlands, cliffs and woodland and magical lakes full of water lilies, dragonflies and damselflies right by the sea.....



Three's a crowd: puffins on Skomer

Holiday Summary

Pembrokeshire Wildlife Safari includes boat trips to the magic Pembrokeshire Islands of Skomer, and Grassholm and an evening seabird safari around the waters of Skomer, a marine conservation area, as the sun starts to go down. We visit the massive lily ponds of Bosherton with their own special woodland and wetland wildlife and the magnificent cliffs and coastline with maritime heathland flora and described by some as one of the top 10 most beautiful walks in the world. We also have an audience with some very confiding owls!

Sailings are subject to safe operating conditions, so we'll keep the timing of our itinerary flexible, to make the best of the sailing conditions. In the event that any of the sailings aren't possible, we have a range of "wild and wonderful" bad weather options to see Welsh wildlife and landscapes in their glory.

Indicative Summary Itinerary

Tuesday 26th May:

Afternoon: New Quay Honey Farm, an audience with owls. Evening: Martin's Haven, Seabird Safari

Wednesday 27th May:

Skomer Island; St Brides / Coast Path

Thursday 28th May:

Grassholm Island; Bosherton

Friday 29th May:

2nd chance for Grassholm or your own exploration of Cilgerran Wildlife Centre.

Tuesday 26th May

Bees and Owls

We'll meet early afternoon at New Quay Honey Farm at Cross Inn, tucked away in a beautiful small valley.



Red Admiral Butterfly at New Quay Honey Farm



New Quay, Ceredigion

The bee farm at Cross Inn started over 20 years ago, and produces honey from the depth and diversity of the wildflowers across Wales. There is also a Meadery at the site which produces a selection of Meads, the oldest alcoholic drink known to man. Most meads have honey added to the basic drink, but meads from New Quay have honey added into the wine making process. The Honey Farm has a great café and shop, and we'll stop for a hot drink and cakes while we wait for Gordon from New Quay Birds of Prey to call us up to meet the owls.



Rogues' Gallery: Cleo, Itch and Al

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. We'll have a good half an hour with the owls, then we head south to Pembrokeshire.

Evening Seabird Spectacular

We'll stop briefly to unload at Slate Mill Lodge, then head down to Martin's Haven for our first boat trip on board the Dale Princess as evening approaches. We'll head directly to Skomer Island cliffs, looking out for nesting kittiwakes, razorbills and guillemots and, of course, puffins coming in after feeding out at sea. Get close-up views of them in their natural element and look out for landmarks for our landing the next day. As the sun is setting on Skokholm and the Skomer Marine Nature Reserve, the Manx shearwaters are rafting, awaiting the cover of darkness to return to their nests on these beautiful Pembrokeshire Islands.



Evening puffin in Skomer waters



Manx shearwaters taking off

Wednesday 27th May: Skomer Island, St Ann's Head and St Brides.

Skomer Island

Today we'll aim for a short sea trip on our way to land on Skomer Island for the day, weather willing. We'll have several hours on the island, and there's so much to see, there'll be a lot of sitting and watching. Maybe harbour porpoise, all manner of seabirds, pipits, little and short-eared owls, ravens and even pheasants! And of course puffins, razorbills and guillemots – watch out for the Skomer “welcome committee” alongside the steps up from the boat. We should also see Atlantic grey seals in the harbour or on the Garland Stone and kittiwakes on the cliffs.



Puffin at the Wick

It's bluebell time, and there is acre upon acre of bluebells, sweeping across the vistas of the island, with their scent all-pervading. Bluebells are woodland flora, testament to the woodlands that once covered Skomer. They now survive courtesy of the summer bracken. Later in the season, the swathes of blue are replaced by the pink of red campion, and we should see the beginning of those

pink vistas too. We keep our eyes peeled for short-eared owls which have done well in the last few seasons.



We'll find a good picnic place on the island – a previous visitor named one “the best picnic spot in the world”! – for lunch and carry on exploring in the afternoon. Small birds on Skomer are very special too, and include all manner of warblers, spotted flycatchers, linnet, wheatear etc. so we'll need to listen hard and keep our eyes peeled. As we go round the island, we'll notice some of the archaeological remains too – Skomer used to support a community of 100 or more people.

Later through the centuries, Skomer, along with many offshore islands, was used as a huge rabbit warren, producing the much prized and sought-after meat for Court and lords' tables. We'll see plenty of evidence of that as we walk around the island, including black, Dutch and long-haired rabbits. We also need to keep a close watch down in the bracken for the endemic Skomer vole – slightly larger than our mainland field voles, and the staple diet of the island's owl population.

St Ann's Head and St Bride's

After disembarking, we can drive the short distance to Dale and stop at the car park serving St Ann's Head. We'll explore the section of the coast path from Frenchman's Bay to St Ann's Head, looking out for stonechat, linnets, whitethroat, chough and birds of prey, among other delights, and the glorious array of wild flowers there. After reaching the lighthouse, we can walk back down the road to the car park and a well-deserved cuppa.



St Ann's Head

If we have time and you're not too tired, we can stop off at the tiny village of St Bride's with its castle and picturesque church, and explore some of the castle's grounds and woodlands before going back to Slate Mill Lodge.



Chiff chaff at St Ann's Head



Ramsons at St Bride's Castle

Thursday 28th May: Grassholm and Bosherton

Grassholm

This morning we have a more leisurely start. Weather-willing, we're off on a magnificent 2 hour trip all the way out to Grassholm with its unbelievable numbers of gannets, and unforgettable noise and smell too! RSPB's Grassholm supports 39,000 pairs of breeding gannets.



Grassholm gannetry



Common dolphin near Grassholm



Gannets displaying on Grassholm

This is the third largest Atlantic gannet colony in the UK (behind St Kilda and Bass Rock), supporting around 10 per cent of the entire world population. The island comes alive in early spring, with gannets returning to the island from late February onwards. A single egg is laid in April and chicks begin to hatch in early June. If you look closely, you might also see a few guillemots looking rather out of place among the gannets.

The gannetry is still expanding, from a distance looking whiter every year. As we turn and sail back towards Martin's Haven, we might be lucky enough to spot some common dolphins.

Bosheston, Elegug Stacks and the Green Bridge of Wales

Upon embarking we'll heading south east to the magnificent Bosherton and the Stackpole Estate. We'll be exploring some very different habitats, the glorious Bosherton lily-ponds, a huge but entirely man-made spectacle, teeming with wildlife. A National Trust reserve, we'll start by investigating the lily pond freshwater lakes, looking out for dragonflies and huge pike lurking under the lily pads. We can walk alongside the lakes watching for herons, egrets and mute swans possibly already with cygnets then climb up to the cliffs to investigate the amazing maritime flora and the breath-taking rock formations.



Eight Arch Bridge, Bosherton



"Watch out little fish" – pike lurking under the water at Bosherton

When we've finished exploring Bosherton and the Stackpole Estate towards late afternoon, we'll drive down through the Castlemartin firing range – assuming firing has finished for the day! – to the awe-inspiring Elegug Stacks, teeming with guillemots and razorbills, and the wonderful Green Bridge of Wales.



Viper's bugloss at the Stackpole Estate



Guillemots at Elegug Stacks



The Green Bridge of Wales

Friday 29th May

Your guided holiday finishes this morning, but you still have a final treat on your way home! Cilgerran Wildlife Centre is the flagship reserve of the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales, providing first class wildlife watching in a series of hides along the Teifi Estuary close to Cardigan as well as some lovely woodlands along the river. Kingfishers are often spotted here, there were cattle egret along the estuary in 2019 and house, sand martins and swallows all feed over the river. There are also otters present on the reserve. Welsh Wildlife Breaks will provide information on the reserve and what to look out for.



Otters at Cilgerran

Note: Boats will only sail if it's safe to do so. If there is unusually severe weather, sailing schedules may be affected. In the unlikely event that our landings are delayed, Welsh Wildlife Breaks has planned some excellent wildlife watching and alternative activities in coastal and inland Pembrokeshire and Ceredigion until sailings resume.

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