

# Ayrshire Birders Abroad

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Private holidays for birding  
friends of the SOC and  
RSPB in Ayrshire and  
beyond. Friends travelling  
together sharing birding and  
cultural experiences in  
mainland Europe, the UK,  
Asia and the Americas.



## Birds and Landscapes of Anglesey & Snowdonia 26 June to 03 July 2010



South Stack, Anglesey



Beautiful Llyn Gwellyn in the heart of Snowdonia



Join us on an early summer journey to the Isle of Anglesey with its rich bird life. The north west coast of the island still has a feeling of remoteness with tiny coves hidden below the cliffs. We will be travelling by comfortable coach from Ayr to the town of Beaumaris which overlooks the widest part of the Menai Straits and across the Bay of Conwy. We are hoping to book one of the characterful hotels in or close by this elegant little town with its moated castle.



We will visit the RSPB reserves at Valley Wetlands and South Stack, where thousands of seabirds breed each year. Live video images are also transmitted to the visitor centres. We should be able to see good numbers of auks, gulls, ravens and choughs here. The Penmon area of the eastern-most part of the island offers some of the best birding in North Wales, as well as great views and interesting and beautiful wild flowers. During early summer, the reedbeds of the wetlands are alive with reed and sedge warblers, marsh harriers overhead and water rails at the fringes of the lakes. We also intend to visit the historic town of Conwy as well as its RSPB reserve; the delightful Bodnant Gardens in the Conwy Valley and the wild and rugged landscapes of Snowdonia. We have the chance to travel on the Welsh Highland Railway - just recently re-opened as far as Beddgelert and the Aberglaslyn Pass. In addition, a drive down the Llyn Peninsula to catch the boat over to Bardsey Island - home to the only bird observatory in Wales. On the way south we will call at RSPB Leighton Moss and on the return journey at the red squirrel reserve at Freshfield, Formby Point - on the Lancashire coast.



**The advisory cost of £775.00 will include half board at our chosen hotel, all coach travel and a journey on the Welsh Highland Railway. If you would like to join us, please send a deposit of £200.00 with your application form. The balance of £575.00 will be payable on or before 01 May 2010.**

Photos from top down:

1; 2 & 3: Interior views of the Liverpool Arms Hotel in Beaumaris - the cosy bars and a four-poster bedroom.  
4: The foreshore at Beaumaris.  
5: Beaumaris Castle.  
6: Arctic tern.  
7 & 8: Views of the Newborough Warren nature reserve area.



# AyrshireBirdersAbroad

Birds and Landscapes of  
Anglesey and Snowdonia  
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## Itinerary

### Saturday 26 June 2010

#### TRAVEL TO THE ISLE OF ANGLESEY

Meet at Dodds coach depot, East Road, Ayr at 07.45 for an 08.00 hrs departure. Cars can safely be left here in Dodds secure car park. We will travel on our usual route south, the A70 via Muirkirk and Douglas to the M74. First stop will be at ANNANDALE WATER SERVICES from 09.45 to 10.15. Continue south along the M74 and M6 to junction 35 and the short drive from here to RSPB's LEIGHTON MOSS reserve. We will have time for lunch at the café and also do some birding. Here from about 12.00 until 14.30.

We then return to the M6 until junction 9 when we join the M56 to CHESTER SERVICES and time for another tea or coffee. Here from 16.00 to 16.30. We now have a short drive along the M56 before joining the A55 coast road which brings us towards Bangor and over the Menai Bridge and the Isle of Anglesey. We hope to stay at the Liverpool Arms Hotel in the town of BEAUMARIS and we should be here to check in by 18.30. Dinner at 19.30 hrs.

### Sunday 27 June 2010

#### BEAUMARIS & NEWBOROUGH WARREN

A leisurely breakfast this Sunday morning and then a birding walk along the shingle beach before we explore the town and its fine castle, built by Edward the First. It was built to a most elaborate design with a moat - intended to control the 'turbulent Welsh!' On the *beau marais*, or 'beautiful marsh', his engineers constructed this magnificent fortress with concentric rings of defensive walls inside a deep moat, with a jetty which allowed the castle to be supplied from the sea. Following this visit we can have lunch in the town.

In the afternoon we will drive to the most south-westerly point of the island at NEWBOROUGH WARREN, dominated by a huge area of sandhills, saltmarshes and dune grasslands. This is situated between the mouth of the Menai Straits and the estuary of Afon Cefni. In 1955 a National Nature Reserve was established here, so that now, 1453 hectares of one of the finest dune systems in the UK is fully protected. There are also large areas of Corsican Pine as well as the saltmarshes which fringe the eastern shore of the Cefni Estuary.

Red-breasted merganser have nested on Anglesey since 1953 and this is one of their regular sites, so one often sees an attentive female and her brood during the summer. Anglesey is the Welsh HQ for breeding terns: common, Arctic, Sandwich, roseate and little terns have all nested in the past and are regularly seen fishing offshore. Greylag geese breed here too, as well as shelducks (in the forest!) and amongst the sandhills. Other birds include sparrowhawk, goldcrest, the tit family, siskins, redpolls and crossbills. In the dunes we should be able to locate tree pipits, whinchats, stonechats, grasshopper warblers and sedge warblers, whitethroats and yellowhammers.

Other residents include little grebes, cormorants, shags, grey herons, mute swans, Canada geese, teals, mallards, kestrels, red-legged partridges, golden pheasants, coots, oystercatchers, ringed plovers, turnstones, large gulls, short-eared owls and a wide range of passerines at the woodland edge.

If we leave Beaumaris at 14.00 hrs we should reach Newborough Warren for 14.30 and can stay until 18.00 hrs. Back at our hotel for around 18.30 and dinner at 19.30 hrs.

Monday 28 June 2010

## THE RSPB ANGLESEY RESERVES OF VALLEY WETLANDS & SOUTH STACK

Breakfast at 07.45 and depart at 08.45, we join the A55 at the Menai Bridge and drive north westwards via Llangristoliu and Llanfanhangel-Ynhowyn, then turning off the main road at CAERGEILIOG for the RSPB's VALLEY WETLANDS reserve. These reed-fringed lakes are one of the best places in Wales to see wildfowl all year round. Tufted ducks, pochards, shovelers, gadwalls and grebes all breed here. At this time of year the reedbeds should be alive with reed and sedge warblers and other reedbed specialists such as water rails, marsh harriers and Cetti's warblers. There is a nature trail of 3.3 km (2 miles) and a network of other paths throughout this extensive reserve. We will be here from 09.30 until 12.00.

We drive on through the railhead and port town of HOLYHEAD and on to the spectacular setting of SOUTH STACK LIGHTHOUSE and the RSPB's SOUTH STACK CLIFFS reserve. A tea room is available here, so we can have a light lunch before exploring the area. We should arrive for 12.30. South Stack cliffs contain some of the most spectacular coastal scenery in North Wales and extend for three kilometres along the north-west coast of HOLY ISLAND (YNYYS GYBI), the most westerly extremity of Anglesey. The main section of cliffs, together with a hinterland of maritime and moorland heath, extending on to Holyhead Mountain, is an RSPB reserve. The lighthouse was built in 1809 and is reached by a flight of steps and a narrow footbridge. Notable plants on the reserve include bog pimpernel, devil's-bit scabious, heath spotted orchid, and pale heath dog violet. Two rarities also occur; the endemic spotted rock-rose, found only on Anglesey, and a maritime variety of field fleawort found only here on South Stack cliffs.

Seabirds are of course one of the main attractions, with over 3,000 guillemots and 1,000 razorbills along with over 100 pairs of breeding puffins. Fulmars, shags, kittiwakes and three large gull species nest on the cliffs. Choughs are another speciality with the close-cropped swards and heaths providing good feeding areas. They often gather in loose flocks of up to 30 individuals. Peregrines nest here too as well as kestrels, stock doves, rock pipits, jackdaws, carrion crows and ravens. Support birds include meadow pipits, stonechats, whitethroats and linnets. The damp areas of PENRHOSFEILW COMMON usually hold lapwings and redshanks. There is a daily passage of Manx shearwaters and many terns are also seen.

We expect to be here until around 16.30 and our route back will include a stop of around 45 minutes at the famous village of LLANFAIRPWLLGWYNGYLLGOGERYCHWYRNDROBWLL ('The church of St. Mary by the white hazel over the whirlpool') and we haven't finished yet - the village name ends with LLANTYSILIOGOGOGOCH ('The church of St. Tysilio close to the red cave'). We should arrive back at the hotel for 18.30 once again and dinner at 19.30 hrs.



Tuesday 29 June 2010

## A DAY IN THE CONWY VALLEY, THE TOWN & RESERVE & THE NT's BODNANT GARDEN

After breakfast we leave for a drive over the Menai Bridge and northwards along the coast through LLANFAIRFECHAN and PENMAENMAWR to the historic town of CONWY, where we will first visit the RSPB CONWY RESERVE. Here from about 09.45 and stay until almost 12.00. The reserve was created following the construction of the Conwy road tunnel. Shallow pools next to the estuary provide ideal feeding and roosting places for ducks and wading birds. There is a nature trail from the visitor centre with its shop, café and toilets. The trail leads to the hides with views over the estuary to Conwy Castle.

Perhaps the most exciting of all breeding bird events in the reserve has been the establishment of little ringed plover. Formerly a rare visitor to the county - the arrival of two in Conwy in 1991 was a highlight. The following year two chicks were raised and subsequently a number of pairs have nested annually. Other breeding species include little grebes, mute swans, shelducks, coots, oystercatchers, ringed plovers, lapwings, redshanks, common sandpipers, skylarks, reed warblers and reed buntings. In addition we should see great crested grebes, sand martins and grasshopper warblers. Curlews reach peak numbers in June and July. We will drive over to the town centre at lunchtime until 14.15 hrs, which should enable us to have a bite to eat and a look around the town. Well worth doing as Conwy is possibly the best preserved medieval fortified town in the UK.

From Conwy we will drive as far as BODNANT GARDEN (National Trust), itself a great place for many species of woodland birds, but also a delight for all those interested in garden design and landscaping as well as its unrivalled collection of rare plants and trees. Here from 14.30 to 16.45 hrs. There is a café, shop and tearoom. Finally, we will drive along the beautiful CONWY VALLEY through LLANWRST, and to BETWS-Y-COED, stopping briefly to view the famous Swallow Falls (17.15 - 17.45). Our route back to the coast takes us over to Capel Curig and the NANT FFRANCON PASS to Bethesda and the A55. We should be back in our hotel for 18.45 and dinner at 19.45 hrs.



**Wednesday 30 June 2010**  
**CIRCULAR TOUR OF ANGLESEY**

After breakfast and a short drive to the easternmost tip of the island - PENMON POINT (or Black Point) we should arrive about 09.20. In early summer there will be a variety of warblers in the scrub and seabirds breeding on nearby PUFFIN ISLAND. The shore could provide anything from waders to raptors and grey seals. Around PENMON PRIORY we should see spotted flycatchers, green woodpeckers, blackcaps, lesser redpolls and bullfinches. The area of scrub nearby is good for grasshopper warblers, and both lesser and common whitethroats, reed buntings and stonechats. The point itself enables views of guillemots, razorbills and fulmars. Close to shore red-breasted mergansers and eiders, with rock pipits, redshanks and oystercatchers on the shoreline itself. The nearby farmland should hold choughs and ravens, and hedgerows may shelter warblers and finches. Buzzards and peregrines are regularly seen and Penmon Pool is good for waders with terns and shelduck on the beach at this point. Here until 11.30 when we drive back through Beaumaris and north to PENTRAETH, passing RED WHARF BAY and the village of BENLLECH. We continue to MOELFRE, a picturesque little village straddling the rocky headland. There are splendid walks which provide good views of the Anglesey coastline. After a walk we should be ready for lunch in a local pub from about 13.00 to 14.00 hrs.

In the afternoon we will continue north to AMLWCH with fine views to BULL BAY, once a busy little shipbuilding port but now a small holiday resort with cliff walks. On through CEMAES to CEMLYN BAY on the north coast. CEMLYN LAGOON has been formed by a shingle-ridge storm beach with an area of brackish water. This has been a nature reserve since the early 1930's. It belongs to the National Trust but is managed by the North Wales Wildlife Trust. The shingle ridge has an interesting maritime flora with sea kale, sea beet, thrift, sea aster, sea milkwort, spring squill and sea purslane. The highlight of Cemlyn is without doubt the tern colonies. Sandwich, common and Arctic terns all nest here. Roseate terns have also nested and little terns occur on passage. A wide range of waders use the muddy fringes of the lagoon and the nearby beach. More unusual species have included little shearwater, little gull, Squacco heron, little egret, Caspian tern, spoonbill, garganey, lesser golden plover, bridled tern, shorelark, Richard's pipit and great grey shrike. Here from 15.00 until 16.45 hrs. We now head south again to LLANYNGHEDL and the A55 to VALLEY. We take a detour to visit the village of RHOSNEIGR and nearby PORT TRECATELL from where a footpath leads to BARCLODIAD Y GAWRES, an ancient burial chamber on the headland with elaborate Stone Age wall carvings. Back at the hotel again for 18.45 and dinner at 20,00hrs.

Thursday 01 July 2010

## LLEYN PENINSULA & BARDSEY ISLAND

BARDSEY, legendary burial place of 20,000 saints, lies just 3.2 kilometres (2 miles) south of the tip of the Lleyn Peninsula. We would be crossing by boat (weather permitting) from Port Meudwy. The island is owned by the Bardsey Trust and is home to the only bird observatory in Wales - open from late March to November. All breeding species are present at this time and these include cormorants, shags, mallards, kestrels, peregrines, moorhens, oystercatchers, lapwings, curlews, herring and greater black-backed gulls, little owls, rock pipits and ravens. Summer visitors include ring ouzels, wheatears, black redstarts, swallows, sand martins and chiffchaffs - which are first to arrive. There are also whimbrels, common sandpipers, redshanks and pied flycatchers. In later summer, turtle doves, swifts and spotted flycatchers usually turn up. Vagrants likely to occur throughout the whole period have included hoopoe and woodchat shrike.

Should conditions not permit the crossing, we will bird the tip of the LLEYN PENINSULA as the sheltered valley of PORTH MEUDWY attracts similar species too - including turtle doves, black redstarts, whinchats, ring ouzels, lesser whitethroats, willow warblers and firecrests. Choughs are also resident here. We would leave Beaumaris at 08.45 and travel south on the mainland via CAERNARFON, PWLLHELI, LLANBEDROG and then B-roads down to PORTH MEUDWY. If time permits (have we not been to Bardsey) we will call at CRICCIETH to view the castle there on the way back to Beaumaris, where we should arrive at 18.45 and dinner at 20.00 hrs.



The Bardsey Island team!



Groppers



Jack snipe



Hoopoe, Bardsey



Whinchat



Manxie chick, Bardsey Island



Subalpine warbler - Bardsey



Bardsey Island

Friday 02 July 2010

## BEDDGELERT & THE ABERGLASLYN PASS ON THE WELSH HIGHLAND RAILWAY

After breakfast, we drive down to CAERNARFON once again from where we can take the train. Today we will be travelling deep into the heart of Snowdonia on the Welsh Highland narrow gauge steam railway. This line has been steadily rebuilt and re-opened over the past 15 years. The line was originally built in 1881 and reached BEDDGELERT, our destination today, by 1923. The line was never a financial success and closed to passengers in 1936. Following a Public Inquiry the now highly successful Ffestiniog Railway gained control of the rights and the trackbed and is now open for tourist traffic throughout the year. It takes us into the hill and mountain scenery of Snowdonia, passing the beautiful Llyn Gwellyn and the station of RHYD-DDU from where the summit of YR WYDDFA (Mount Snowdon) can be seen. Red kite, buzzard,

goshawk, , kestrel and raven are all possible along this superb stretch of line. We carry on after a short break, down this newly opened section through deep forests to BEDDGELERT in time for lunch at a local pub (or café). We will then have the opportunity to walk into the beautiful ABERGLASLYN PASS (which the railway also traverses again after many years). Here, common sandpipers can be seen along the edge of the fast flowing river while pied flycatchers, siskins, crossbills, nuthatches, wood warblers and more can be seen in the nearby woodland, with wheatear and whinchat on the higher ground. Undoubtedly this is one of the highlights of the trip and offers a day of unrivalled and wild beauty from the comfort of our slowly moving carriage. The trains are hauled by huge (for narrow-gauge standards) articulated Beyer-Garratt steam locomotives built in Manchester at the Gorton Foundry for export to South African and Rhodesian Railways. Three of these beauties are now back in Wales - and they fit into this rugged landscape just as they would have done in their other life in southern Africa. A buffet car service offering coffee, tea, light snacks, wines and local real ales is available on all trains. We should be back at our hotel for 19.00 hrs and dinner at 20.00hrs.



**Saturday 03 July 2010**

**RETURN FROM ANGLESEY VIA THE LANCASHIRE COAST AT FORMBY**

We depart for Ayr at 08.45 and leave BEAUMARIS for the mainland. We travel along the North Wales coast road as far as QUEENSFERRY and join the M56 with a stop at CHESTER SERVICES for coffee and also to buy provisions for our picnic lunch today. Here from 10.10 until 10.50. On again through RUNCORN and join the M57 at junction 6 as far as the A5207 and the A565 to FORMBY on the Lancashire coast and on to FORMBY POINT and the National Trust RED SQUIRREL RESERVE at FRESHFIELD. This area includes dunes backed by woodlands of pines and poplars. Formby is a noted haunt of passerine migrants and in summer little gulls are in the Formby Channel as well as gannets, fulmars and kittiwakes. There is a chance of Mediterranean shearwaters, but regular visitors include several hundred common terns, with smaller numbers of Sandwich and little terns, and rarely, Arctic and roseate terns as well. In addition, another wildlife interest is the red squirrel reserve where the National Trust have re-introduced the species from the continent. They can now be seen throughout the area. This would be a good place for our picnic lunch today and we will be here from around 11.30 until 14.00 hrs. Then we return to the motorway at the junction 7 of M58 and head east to the M6. Our next stop will be TEBAY SERVICES for a coffee break from 15.45 to 16.15. Then along the M6 to the M74 and the A75 to DUMFRIES where we arrange dinner at the SOLWAY GATE INN from 17.45 until 19.30. Return to Ayr on the A76 and A70 - arriving in AYR around 21.30 where we can collect our cars from Dodds depot.

